Sevens

3 - Could it be He's Actually Quite Dark? That Third Generation?

Wai

Prologue

The Bahnseim Kingdom's capital city, Centralle.

Befitting of the capital city of the empire, it was a metropolis brimming with people.

It's said that all the people and products of the country gather there, but looking at its difference in scale from the other cities, one would have no choice but to accept that fact.

Centralle was a city filled with a mix of pretty main roads, and old and gloomy back alleyways.

In a place like that, I, the『Idiotic Noble Brat』of Dalien,【Lyle Walt】, my former fiancée【Novem Forxuz】, and the one who became comrades with us in Dalien, a city nice to newbie adventurers,【Aria Lockwarde】made a stop on our travels.

From my position as a Noble's son, I made a complete change, became an adventurer, and went to the capital to prepare to head to whatever town we would set as our next home.

While Centralle was in the center of the country, it wasn't a city friendly to adventurers.

It's because they couldn't have their scarce job market be put to feeding said adventurers.

The public safety was maintained by the soldiers and knights, so there was barely anywhere left for adventurers to get a turn.

Even if work did come up, it would be for a well-known adventurer taking on the work of some noble or merchant.

The rest of the lot could only barely scrape by.

In a city like that, masses of people came and went, and the streets were well cared for.

In order to migrate to another part of the land, it was quite a

convenient place to stop by.

With bright brown hair tied in a side ponytail, Novem was sitting drinking after-meal tea in the store we stopped by for lunch.

Her pale skin and violet eyes seemed to suck one in.

If there was anything I had to brag about, it would be this well-put-together former fiancée Novem.

But perhaps she was a little too devoted, as she was truly trying to actualize the harem plan I voiced as I lie.

As perfect as she was, could it be there was something out of place somewhere?

Novem, and the other…

With red hair grown out to her back that curled up out of habit, there was Aria.

We met when I was to subjugate a bandit brigade, and from then, she started taking action alongside us. The comrade we gained in Dalien.

The two girls and I, the three of us were seated around a round table at a snack food shop.

After finishing our meal, we started to talk about the information we had gathered.

I went up first.

“I’ve gone around, and looked at the weapons and armor, but I still think it may be a bit too early for us to head to the free city of Beim. The shopkeepers all informed me that before going there, I better pile up some more skill.”

Beim was a city ruled by merchants, and its abundance of jobs made it an easy place for an adventurer to live.

But at the same time, the areas out of the scope of merchants had a tendency to have a lack of public order.

Without enough experience, if we were to head to Beim, then young adventurers like us would soon be looked upon as prey. The possibility was high.

I have the confidence to get back at whoever would do such a thing, but raising a ruckus wouldn't be to my advantage.

Novem agreed.

"I am the same. I was shopping with Aria-san, but it sound like Beim will be rough. Our lack of numbers is another problem they spoke of."

For adventurers, a group of three was on the lesser side.

Numbers are power, and that alone would make an opponent hesitate to play their hand.

However, teenage adventurers with scarce numbers like us had a tendency to be targeted.

Aria was the same.

"They told me that a young girly like me shouldn't set foot in there as an adventurer. A large number of mercenary brigades set up residence there, and there are plenty of people there who shouldn't be approached."

It was definitely true it was an easy place for adventurers, but the sack of public safety was just as true.

But for adventurers, heading to Beim was an unavoidable trial. A majority of famed adventurers received their calls to fame while working there.

Of course, it's not like my end goal was to succeed as an adventurer.

… More so, I didn't have a goal in general.

I simply worked as one in order to live, and the earnings weren't all too bad.

But I don't plan on going on like this.

“Since it’s come to this, we’ll put Beim on hold. Even if we’re to go, it would be better if we gathered up numbers first. Anyways, we just need to join in a party with adequate numbers.”

As I said that, Novem showed some disapproval.

It’s not rare for parties of two or three to act together. Many adventurers cooperate on jobs, and don’t get involved with each other in other matters.

But it looks like Novem was opposed.

“I’m against it. The leader of this party is Lyle-sama. But But speaking to our age, both you and I are but of fifteen years. It we are to link with another group, we will definitely be treated as inferiors.”

And Aria whispered something unrelated.

“… I’m sixteen, you know…”

“Is that so? I’m counting on you from here on as well, Aria-san.”

It looks like Novem wouldn’t allow anyone but me to be the leader.

In the city of Dalien, our experienced advisor taught us quite a few things.

In a period of three months, we hammered the experience that would build our foundations into our bodies.

But in the end, it was but the foundations.

“If merging with another party is impossible, then… the only option left is to invite people into our own. Do you think there are that many adventurers who want to enter our party?”

We were all generally young.

Rather than the prime of our lives, we were in the prime of our growth.

If they buy into our future prospects, perhaps our comrades will increase, but the usual pattern is that it’s the party with greater

numbers that takes in the younger members in order to increase the power of the next generation.

Parties made up of only young people don't have it that easy.

"Considering that, should we just head to the city of scholars? 【Arumsaas】 has a large library, and I've heard it has numerous private schools and training halls. There are campuses for study, and they take in a wide variety of youths."

Hearing that, it sounded as if going there would be like commuting to school.

I'm the same, but Novem was born into a Noble House.

Starting with reading and writing, she's received a proper education.

Aria didn't have problems with the three Rs either. For argument's sake, she even committed etiquette to heart.

"So we'll be applying to learn specialized fields? It will be hard to find the time and money for that. I've no intention to commute to a school for years."

As I said that, Novem shook her head.

"There is no need for us to enroll. They call out to those who've graduated formal education, and those aiming to find adventurer work in the city of scholars as well."

Satisfied with that, Aria nodded a few times.

"Come to think of it, the leftover kids of imperial nobles also enroll there. Like second and third sons not succeeding their houses, or second and third daughters and the like. You often hear of them going to get some skills to carry out governmental work. Of course, there're also some stories of them failing, and changing to adventurers or mercenaries."

Novem took over Aria's explanation.

"If there are youths there with an extent of knowledge, experience and technique, then how about we try recruiting at Arumsaas? We

aren't in any sort of hurry, so we can even study while doing guild work."

Hearing that, Aria started talking as if she had remembered something.

"Arumsaas is the city of scholars, so I heard in the past that they were full of really strange requests. Also, there are plenty of adventurers there like us. Searching for comrades, or staying in order to search for a party. Those sorts of people are numerous."

Having heard both of their opinions, I began considering whether it was best to set out there.

There, a voice came from the blue Jewel hanging on my neck.

Jewel… they recorded the single Skills that manifested in individuals, and transmit them. As a gem, this one recorded a total of eight Skills.

The Jewel was a tool that held the function to teach the stages of a Skill a gem could not, and also whatever other useful applications the Skill held.

The blue one in my possession had a characteristic of causing Support Class Skills to emerge.

The red rem around Aria's neck was for Vanguard Class.

And Yellow Gems recorded Readguard Class Skills.

Hers was a gem, but once they turn to Jewels, a large change comes about.

『Library, is it… in my time, the city of scholars wasn't a thing. I think it was【Town of Sages】? It was called a gathering of bigoted old men back then.』

The one I heard was the Third Generation.

The Third Generation Head of the provincial noble Walt House, 【Sleigh Walt】's voice.

Right.

The memories stored in the memories of the Skills, their hearts… those were what transmitted the ways to use the Skills.

OF course, that wasn't just a good thing.

Silky blond hair that hung down to his shoulders.

While the Walt House currently held Count Status, back in the Third Generation's time, it was at Baron level…

From the lowest knight class, it was just one rank higher.

He was a man who left his name in history as one who safeguarded the retreat of a king, but… I can't think of this person as anything so righteous.

He looked stylish, and he was always smiling. With blond hair and blue eyes, he looked like a good tempered older brother.

That was the impression he gave off.

Following on from the Third Generation, I heard the Fourth's voice.

『You really do love books. If only you ran your internal affairs with so much zeal when you were alive.』

On the Fourth's remark kneaded with sarcasm, the Third laughed.

『It's best to take everything in moderation. Also, even if I didn't do it, I had subordinates for that, and all we had to do was work based on the Second Generation's plan.』

Despite the Third Generation being the first one to carve the Walt Family's name into the history of the Bahnseim Kingdom, he truly seemed to have a carefree personality, and he didn't seem to hold interest in anything.

His interest in domestic affairs and war was particularly light.

(Really, why was this man called such a righteous general…)

As I thought that, Novem seemed worried about me. Her expression looked dark.

“What’s wrong, Lyle-sama? Are you feeling alright?”

In comparison to Novem’s worried words, Aria was cold.

“I-it’s because you stay up so late at night! I-it’s because you say things like that…”

Her face was tinted red, but I shot back.

“Things like that? More so, I slept quite early yesterday. The only time I stayed up so late was the night we arrived here. What’s more, the one who looked sleepy the next day was you, Aria.”

I returned those words, but Aria’s reaction was strangely sharp.

“W-whose fault do you think that is!? Whose!?”

By the way…

The people around me cannot hear the voices from the Jewel.

I’ll also put this out, but there are as many voices in the Jewel, as there are people who had their Skills recorded into it.

There are Seven… no, there were.

Now, the Six ancestors talk with me like this. But the others can’t hear them, so it’s quite troubling a lot of the time.

The hunter-styled Second Generation spoke.

Let me at on that generations two through four showed heavy favoritism towards Novem.

But Aria was different.

『What a noisy woman.』

The Sixth voiced his agreement.

『Quite right.』

And in the end… my grandfather, the Seventh Generation closed the matter.

『Whatever the case, if Beim sounds impossible, then isn't Arumsaas good enough? I'll bet the Third Generation wasn't to read his books, but wouldn't it just be fine to head to Beim after gathering your party there? I mean, the knowledge and technology of the city of scholars is known not only throughout Bahnseim, but the surrounding countries as well.』

Sometimes noisy.

Sometimes acting up to deplete my Mana and make me collapse.

Sometimes giving me advice. My ancestors.

I took their opinions into account, and let out my conclusion.

"That sounds nice. It will be safer than travelling to Beim, and it seems it would be for our sake."

To put it more specifically, it's like past personalities just reside in the recorded Skills.

That's all it is, but… the Jewel even recorded their hearts.

It's truly troublesome, yet I can only be thankful to them…

"Anyways, once we've finished our preparations, let's set off for Arumsaas. Lyle-sama, we'll have to book a coupled carriage ticket."

Novem holds down Aria, and recommends the purchase of a ticket.

A coupled carriage is, well, a series of carriages coupled together. That's all it is, but by that, goods and people can be carried en masse.

Using Magic Tools, it became possible to decrease the fatigue, and increase the strength of the horses.

It was one of the common transportation methods linking large cities and towns.

"Got it. If we're preparing now… would a departure tomorrow be fine?"

I sought confirmation from the two of them, and Novem and Aria

both nodded.

Novem was smiling.

Aria was averting her gaze with a flushed face.

(Did I really do something to her?)

I thought whether I had done something bad to Aria, but the Fourth, who repeatedly told me to handle women with the utmost caution let out a sigh.

『For you to truly not notice… Lyle, maybe it really is best if you go off and learn a few things.』

I thought.

(And that's why we're going to the city of scholars, isn't it…)

❼

Aboard a coupled carriage from Centralle, we headed for Arumsaas.

The roads for the trip were well maintained, and with stops at the towns we passed through, we were able to arrive in five days.

If we were on a normal carriage, or on foot, it would take much more time.

We crossed the walls encircling the city, and were surprised from the make unlike the towns and cities we had visited before.

"Amazing."

As I muttered that, Novem dismounted the carriage, and voiced her agreement.

"I've heard they have various research facilities, so I really is different from other cities."

Aria also consented.

While she had heard tales of it, coming here the first time was likely

surprising.

“That building in the center, isn’t it taller than Centralle’s royal palace? Even so, how should I put this…”

Before Aria could say it, I opened my mouth.

“It’s a complete mess.”

Ignoring the very concept of scenery, the city was flooded with tall buildings. At the same time, there were constructs with quite strange structures littered around.

There were some with smoke rising from their lined-up chimneys, and even some that were shaped as if large pieces of vegetation were bore through.

It felt much more mixed than Centralle’s cityscape.

“How should I put this, it’s as if everything they could think of was forcefully shoved and shaken up inside a box.”

As Novem said that, Aria agreed.

“Come to think of it, it really does give off the feeling of a boy’s toy chest. Not tidied up cleanly, with everything just shoved inside.”

Hearing of a toy box, some of my past memories revived in me.

It was the happenings of before I was deserted by my parents.

My father bought me toys.

My mother got angry at me for not putting them away.

It felt really nostalgic.

Of course, those warm memories would come to an end at ten.

The cause was my sister, Celes.

Stronger than me. Smarter than me. Loved by everyone.

According to the one who taught me all he had, and recognized me…

A【Monster】.

Having acknowledged me, and having fulfilled his role in the Jewel, I was unable to meet the First Generation Head anymore.

The one that man told me to be most vigilant of was my own sister, Celes.

(If I were to study here, would I be able to surpass her?)

Beaten black and blue by that sister, I lost and was driven out of the house. To me, she was nothing but a symbol of fear now.

(… Let's not think about it for now. But someday…)

Resolving my heart, I took up Novem and Aria's baggage, and started to move.

"Well then, let's find an inn, and take it easy. It will be tiring if we just keep on moving."

As I said that, Aria returned a quip.

"The tired one is you, isn't it? Make sure you don't collapse as usual again."

… My Mana drained by the Jewel, I had already collapsed a number of times, so there was nothing I could say in return.

Novem came to my side on the matter. She did, but…

"Lyle-sama has already been graced with a Growth, so he should be fine. Isn't that right, Lyle-sama?"

Growth… in this world, it was like overcoming a wall, and like that, feeling a sense of rebirth.

It was without a doubt, the sensation of surpassing the me I once was.

But at the same time, it makes one feel larger than life.

Looking at me, Aria covered her mouth, and stifled some laughter.

Novem put on a smile enveloped in warmth, as she looked at me.

“… Stop it. Please stop.”

Even just remembering it made my face red.

Even when I should have experienced one at a much younger age, I experienced my first Growth at Fifteen.

I experienced it, and frolicked around in the sensation of being reborn anew.

It was a memory I didn’t want brought up again.

Aria spoke.

“Lyle, don’t worry… you were really interesting back then.”

I responded.

“I told you to stop, didn’t I!? Also, at that time, you said, ‘Mine was nothing like this!’ Right? That means something happened right! It did, didn’t it!?”

“T-that isn’t the case!”

There, I heard a voice from the Jewel.

It was the Fourth

『That attitude he keeps taking against this girl… yep, it’s a lecture later.』

There are times when nothing but my consciousness is sucked into the Jewel.

And like that, I’m able to meet with the ancestors.

Him saying I’ll be lectured means I’ll probably be summoned sometime later.

The driest one, the Fifth spoke.

『You can ignore that female ass-licker, and just go search for an inn already. If you just stay rowdy in the middle of the street like that, you’ll attract attention.』

Among the heads of history, the Fifth was said to have had the largest amount of mistresses, and he is recorded as the greatest womanizer of the Walt House.

But the reality was different.

He didn't seem to be all too interested in sensual love as a whole.

In exchange, he doted on soft animals to a strange extent.

"… Ku, shouting here won't get us anywhere. Let's be off."

"… I know."

I turn my eyes away from Aria's glare, and looked around for an inn.

If there was a signboard, I planned to enter and check for vacancies.

Novem started laughing to herself, looking at me and Aria.

"What's happened?"

When I asked, Novem answered with a smile.

"No, the two of you are just getting along better than before, so I was simply happy. Now shall we go?"

On her response, I really didn't know what to say.

The one I truly loved was Novem, and I even confessed already.

But her answer was, 'until you succeed in making a harem, you can't just give up!'

Wondering just where I went wrong, I dropped my shoulders, and walked down the streets of Arumsaas, the city of scholars.

1 - Arumsaas Guild

Having secured an inn, we decided to head off towards the guild.

In the city that spread out like a labyrinth, we frequently asked the passersby for directions while aiming for the adventurer guild.

The road were clean, and the people treading on them also had a sense of cleanliness to them.

But that didn't change that it was a jumbled up city, and one easy to be lost in.

Using Skills, I confirmed the area, but being in quite a needlessly complicated location was perhaps the characteristic of Arumsaas' adventurer guild.

"The fact that carriages are going down that way means the other way is too hard to get through?"

After overcoming the maze and arriving at the guild hall, a building on a smaller scale than the one in Dalien was laid out before me. Despite the size of the city, it gave off quite a diminutive impression.

I don't know if guild first floors were the same everywhere, but it was operating like a marketplace.

Adventurers and carts went back and forth, and monster materials and magic gems were exchanging hands.

Occasionally, a merchant would make a purchase, and leave with a large amount of goods loaded on his wagon.

"It looks like guilds don't change wherever you go."

Aria muttered that, and Novem agreed.

However…

"Looking from outside, they may be the same. But as I thought, the atmosphere really changes depending on the guild. Weihs was the

same.”

Weihs was the name given to the land the Walt House governed.

It was developed enough to have cities that could be called metropolises, and it had its own adventurers’ guild.

But I’m not too knowledgeable about that matter.

The Seventh spoke.

『We did prepare a plot of land for them, but it’s a mass of criminals, deserters, and wannabees. I left it alone in order to secure magic stones, but… it wasn’t very necessary in my time.』

A large portion of adventurers were ruffians… if a mercenary or criminal called themselves an adventurer, then that’s what they were.

The only difference lay in whatever they called themselves.

Naturally, the guild does regulate their criminals, but if they claimed to be able to manage them all, then I would call that nothing but suspicious.

There are some sinners out there who simply change their home guild in order to flee.

Adventurers exist to hunt those sorts of adventurers as well. Those specialized in the trade known as bounty hunting.

It sounds like the Sixth was of the same opinion.

『If you send out soldiers, you can easily get your hands on monster materials and magic stones. Work is also abundant… but still, there are guys who aren’t satisfied staying on the sidelines. There’s no helping it.』

While the Sixth and Seventh thought of them as an unavoidable trouble, the Third had a different opinion.

『You guys sure are harsh. If you can use them, why not just use them? I mean, they have the rights to magic stones, and they’re pretty much a mercenary management facility. There’s no meaning in making them enemies. Remaining vigilant, and maintaining a

moderate sense of distance is important.』

It seems the Third held a concept of making use of the guild.

The Second supplemented his answer.

『Come to think of it, it was in your time, right… that a guild was built up at our place.』

It seems it was around the Third's time that a guild was built on Walt land. Even when it's a time when they shouldn't have been too developed, I'm surprised they were able to get one of those.

As if noticing my curiosity, the Third gave an answer.

『It's because a lot of monsters live in the remote regions, and it was a good environment to obtain monster materials and magic stones. I didn't interfere too much, or restrict them.』

The feudal lord has the power to levy heavy taxes on the guild.

In that case, that influences the price of stones and materials, and there are even some places where earning become impossible no matter how hard you struggle.

But in that case, the adventurers would flow away. If they become excessively depressed about their lack of profit, quite a few problems may crop up, it seems.

"Novem, what was the Weihs Guild like? I've never been, so I don't know."

As I asked about the Weihs guile, she made a bit of a troubled face.

Not in a bad way, just that it seemed explaining would be a pain.

But to put is simply…

"Neither good nor bad, something like that, perhaps. They were quite hard with cracking down on criminals, and the tax didn't seem too high, or too low. It didn't seem to be a guild where problems would come up with putting food on the table, and I think it had a relatively large amount of adventurers."

Hearing that, the Seventh was delighted.

『It's just as it was in my time. Yep, perfect.』

The adventurer hating Seventh seems to have been troubled with mercenaries before.

And the cause was the guild or something like that…

(Perhaps the time will come to ask about the specifics someday.)

We entered Arumsaas' guild.

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The difference between it and Dalian was that several excessively large bulletin boards were stationed around the place.

Both sides of the large boards were in use, and requests were tacked onto them in great numbers.

Gather the necessary monster materials.
Please clean my room.
Won't you become a test subject?

Quite a number of sheets were submitted.

"What is this… it's on another level from Dalien."

As I was sent into confusion, Aria was as well. WE looked at each other, and grimaced.

"Isn't this one strange? It's got room cleaning written on it, but the location is one of the campus's research facilities. Do they really allow adventurers to waltz into places like that?"

Quite a few incomprehensible requests were spread out.

As we headed to the receptionist desks, we found a larger number of clerks than in Dalien seated behind partitioned counters.

While their appearances ranged from youths to seniors, they gave off a disinterested impression as they quietly proceeding with their

work.

In narrow spaces, they formally addressed their business.

The Fourth looked at them, and spoke.

『This is quite a peculiar guild. Well, since there isn't a feudal lord here, perhaps they aren't pressured enough… how should I put this, I get the feeling that there are few requests that would make one satisfied as an adventurer to be found here.』

Collecting certain monster parts was definitely quite adventurer-esque.

But that would take place in a labyrinth managed by the city of scholars, and we would just have to strip off the parts of a designated monster, or so it was written.

For the three of us, it was a bit rough of a request.

(With labyrinths, if it's the three of us, shallow ones aside, a managed one with multiple floors sounds difficult.)

It would probably be better for us to hunt monsters in the area to earn our living expenses.

As we submitted our home transfer requests, the receptionist gave a monotonous explanation.

"Is this your first time in Arumsaas?"

It was a male clerk with glasses, and hair parted in a 7:3 ratio. Unlike Hawkins-san, his feelings didn't seem to be behind it at all.

Was Hawkins-san just exceptionally diligent?

Novem responded.

"It's the first for all three of us. We are here with the intention of studying, and I believe we will not be performing too many requests."

The receptionist put my guild card into a device to confirm it.

“… Your evaluations in regards to requests receive a passing grade. You even completed an emergency request, and received an assessment of【A】from the guild. Dalien, is it… the quality of adventurers there isn’t the best, so I can’t really say anything, but please complete Arumsaas’ requests with that dedication as well. If you don’t believe you will be able to, it would help if you would say that clearly.”

The receptionist took up a slight condescending attitude, but getting angry at him seemed stupid, so I nodded as I accepted the guild card.

The Second Generation snorted as he spoke.

『So you can find these sorts everywhere you go. Those guys that think they’re above everything? That if you’re different from them, you must be below them?』

The Third rebuked him.

『This is the city of scholars, so couldn’t it be that they have confidence in their wisdom? Be a little more tolerant. I mean, we haven’t felt any real harm yet.』

For some reason, I feel he put some strong emphasis on the ‘yet’ part of it, but anyways, I answered the receptionist.

“I’ll do the best I can.”

“… Is that so. Well then, I will be looking after the second copy of the guild card. Do you need an explanation on that? If you do, that’s extra.”

You charge for that? As I thought that, I shook my head.

I finish my greetings with the apathetic clerk, finished up the paperwork, and we all left the guild.

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Having exited the building, the complaints we had towards the

receptionist started coming out.

At a snack shop close to our inn, we finished our meal before expressing our dissatisfaction.

It was mainly Aria.

“This place kinda has a bad feel to it.”

The man’s attitude was one thing, but she probably hated the fact that Dalien was being looked down upon.

To her, Dalien was Zelphy’s town.

And it was also the town that took in her family. Having been part of an imperial noble family in Centralle, through the misdeeds of a single family head, the House forfeited its peerage over the course of a single lifetime.

When they had been banished from the capital, the place to accept them was Dalien.

While Novem seemed to understand that fact, she covered for the receptionist.

“This place is different from Dalien. But if they’re going to indifferently carry out their work like that, it may be relatively easy to get by. I mean, where someone like Hawkins-san would caution against taking a life-threatening request, I doubt those people would really care.”

Rather than covering, she let out quite a dark statement.

But the fact that we aren’t worrying anyone was comforting, in a sense.

I started conversing with the two on what to do from here on.

“How about we put that aside, and decide on where to live? Unlike Dalien, I doubt they have any houses so moderately priced, so this time, it has to be an apartment, right? Will we live with the three of us, or rent three narrow rooms? We’ll have to decide that soon, and search for property promptly.”

A characteristic of the city of Arumsaas was that rather than houses, apartments were the majority.

The reason was that students came and left in large numbers, so there were few that prepared houses for themselves.

With the city where many youths gathered to learn, and be on their way, apartments were the main stream.

“If possible, the three of us together would be nice. We shouldn’t have too much of a problem with money for a while, so perhaps it would be good to see how much earnings we can expect here before deciding.”

With Novem’s proposal in mind, I thought of hunting monsters sometime tomorrow.

The Ancestors agreed, but only the Third Generation…

『Let’s go to the library. Library. We’ll be fine for a while, and if you find a profitable request to raise your name with, won’t you be fine for a while?』

His feelings were already directed towards the library.

Personally, I also wanted to go, but daily earning was serious business.

Regarding that, the money-loving Fourth shouted out.

『That’s for after you speculate your income, right!? It’s because you’re like this, that the territory was…』

Generally, the Fourth was regarded as extraordinary in financial relations and internal affairs. He had an intelligent appearance, glasses and all.

Mainly in domestic matters, the fourth was exceedingly reliable.

But as we were left without and land to manage, and the money management was left to Novem, he wasn’t able to get a turn.

The Third spoke with a slight fed up tone.

『You're way too harsh with money. Just who did this boy grow to resemble?』

As the Fourth's father, the Third said that, the Fifth took over.

That was usually the Fourth's role.

『Just leave it there. Even if Lyle's Mana stock increased, the First's Skill is storing up Mana in itself every day. At this point, there's no point in trying to train him a little by acting up.』

In the past…

They thought I was the type that didn't gain Mana as I experienced Growth.

From my aptitude in using two sabres, they thought I was the type that gained technique through the process.

(And wait, I have two arms here, so isn't it natural for be able to use two sabres?)

It wasn't the least bit of a wonder to me, but when I told the ancestors that…

『『『You're the strange one here!』』』

Apparently.

And in order to build up my mana, they forcefully went and expended it to the bare minimum. That style of training was put on me against my will.

What's more, I wasn't even informed about it.

In the end, I wasn't a technique type, but a type where all my specs receive drastic increases, but in exchange, I needed several times the amount of experience than a normal human. A late blooming type.

(My Skill, 【Experience】, is one that lets me get a larger quantity of experience, but it's one that stays constantly active, so my Mana expenditure is just as large as before.)

I’m also skilled in magic, but as I had a limit placed on how much of it I could use, my Mana drainage was one of my larger problems.

“Let’s put hunting monsters for tomorrow, and spend today gathering some information on the area. In that case, maybe we’ll visit the library, though asking something would work as well…”

A voice called out to our table.

“Ah, could it be Aria?”

Hearing the voice, Aria turned around.

Her expression was a shocked one clearly questioning why the holder of said voice was in a place like this.

“As I thought! You’re Aria Lockward, right? It’s me. 【Miranda Circry】! We’d played together many a time in the imperial capital, so I had a hunch it was you, by some chance.”

The person addressing us was a slightly mature-looking woman.

But her age itself wasn’t all too different from ours.

If you’re asking for characteristics, they would be her emerald eyes, and pale brownish-green wavy hair that came as a set with them.Her slanted eyes that gave her a mischievous look was likely one of her charms.

While carrying a mature impression with her, she was lively, and a woman that looked to have some childish parts to her… that was Miranda Circry.

“Miranda? Why are you in a place like this? You’re the Circry’s eldest, are you not!?”

Aria spoke with an amazed tone.

It wouldn’t be strange to find a second or third child in the city of scholars, but the eldest daughter was another story.

It was a spot mainly reserved for marrying into other families, or having others marry into the family.

“We’ve got four sisters over there, so it’s fine if just two of us do as we please. More importantly, you could have told me if you were coming here…”

As Miranda made a slightly sorrowful expression, Aria spoke awkwardly.

“I arrived today. Until then, I was in Dalien.”

While she gave a simple explanation, she didn’t look at Miranda’s face there onwards.

Seeing her attitude, Miranda gave a sardonic smile.

“I’m not that concerned about it… I mean, we all played together with Shannon, didn’t we?”

Some Shannon girl popped up, but following the flow of the conversation, she was likely a friend, or Miranda’s younger sister.

Aria answered with silence.

“… Sorry. I’ve been attending this academy from three years ago. I’ll tell you my address, so stop by if you want. Shannon will be delighted.”

Saying that, she wrote her information on a sheet, and in place of Aria, who wouldn’t accept anything, she handed it to me.

“I apologize, but what is your relation to Aria?”

I should probably put it out here clearly that I’m her party member…

“She is one of Lyle-sama’s lovers.”

From the side, Novem cut in.

Miranda looked flabbergasted, but as I panicked to correct the misunderstanding, she burst into laughter.

“Ahahaha, sorry. That was a good one. That Aria has a boyfriend… what’s more, one of the man’s lovers means there are more? I thought you were the pretty boy type, but you’ve got some game, man.”

She stuck her elbow into me, and waved her right hand as she left.

Before I could correct anything, it was all over.

Hanging my head, I turned to Aria.

“She sounded like a good person, but are you unsatisfied about something?”

Aria let out a sigh.

“That’s not it. She really is a good person. She’s just a year older, but she’s good at looking after others, and whenever a bad rumor came up about our place, she always stuck up for me… but she’s too good at looking after others to a fault, you know. She’s good natured, and she’ll never talk bad about anyone.”

Good natured to a fault, was how Aria assessed Miranda.

On her fifty cents, Novem coincided.

“Perhaps she’s one whose two faces overlap. No, perhaps one just good at dealing with things? Even so, I heard that a large number of students came in from Centralle, but I never thought we would be meeting one of Aria-san’s acquaintances like this.”

I thought the same, but Aria seemed to be at her wit’s end.

“Miranda’s on the better side. But if I were to meet the others…”

She seemed depressed.

I tried asking.

“Come to think of it, why did you go about ignoring her? If she’s a good person, it would be fine to talk with her, wouldn’t it?”

As I said that, Aria gave a straightforward answer.

“It’s because she’s a good person. Because of that, even she started to get slander going on around her. That’s why I took the initiative to distance myself. Although it was soon after that I was driven out of Centralle anyways.”

It seems she has a lot going on here.

But here and now, wouldn't it be fine to get along? That was my opinion.

(You should treasure your friends… especially those that don't go away when you're going through hard times.)

As Aria had friends of the same gender like I never did, I felt just a little envious.

To me, Novem was a target of affection, and not my best friend.

(If you look at recent times, I guess it's Rondo-san's group? I wonder what they're doing now…)

I looked down at Miranda's memo, as I worried about how Rondo-san was faring.

❼

In the inn, before retiring to bed.

I came to the space round table known as the conference room.

In the very center of the room, the center of the table, a large blue jewel shined.

Around the room, six doors were installed, and those were what acted as the ancestors' personal quarters.

There were seven chairs in total.

In a room like that, today, it was just the Sixth for a change.

"Huh? Are you alone today? Where's the Fifth?"

I moved my gaze to search for the Fifth Generation, but the Sixth gave a bitter smile.

『It's not like I'm always with my pops, you know.』

The Sixth's Skill was one that was born with the Fifth's Skill as its

premise. It determined the enemies and allies within a perimeter, and even conveyed the locations of traps. He was the possessor of the Skill,【Search】.

When the two Skills were used together, it generated an extraordinary effect.

In one's head, a map would appear, and the locations of everything were known on it. For an enemy, it was quite a frightening Skill.

"Then are you the one that called me?"

『Yeah.』

He often agreed with the Fifth, and he was a rare find in the Walt Family History, where the father-son relationship was actually good.

I've rarely seen sighns of him bickering with my grandfather, the Seventh, either.

With his unkempt hair pushed back, the Sixth Generation, who gave off a wild impression, was was quite docile before the Fifth.

Normally, he came as a set with the Fifth, so I began to think of it as the usual.

『The truth is… I know of the Circry Family, so I thought I would inform you.』

"Miranda-san's House?"

The Sixth was one with a lot of bad rumors circulating around him.

Taking bribes, using his connections to the imperial nobles at the capital, and making them move to his advantage, and other such things.

For that reason, he was known as the greatest fiend to the Walt House… but I really didn't get that feeling from him.

Of all else, the Third was much more scheming.

『We've been associated with them in the past. It's because my younger sister married into their house.』

That was the first I heard of something like that.

No, perhaps I just never knew it, and my family actually was on good terms with them.

It's just that my father… to the Eigth Generation, it was just a link from two generations ago.

From the point of view of Bahnseim Nobles, They were pretty much irrelevant.

"So you're saying there's a possibility they still have ties to our House?"

『The chances are slim, but keep it in mind. I don't really want to doubt them too much, but… it's that. I didn't have too many sisters I got along with.』

Having heard that, I remembered a single fact.

The Sixth had an exceedingly large number of younger siblings.

I mean, the Fifth had five woman waiting on him, legal wife included. He had five ladies by his side.

What's more, all five of them cleared all of the Walt Family Precepts.

It's a surprise that he went after so many woman, but the more surprising thing was that…

"… I believe it was around thirty brothers and sisters younger than you, was it?"

『… Yeah.』

We both made a questionable face.

While the Fifth was definitely famous as the greatest luster of Walt History, the individual himself held quite a dry impression.

I can't think of him as one twisted by carnal lust.

"Somehow, the gap between the ancestors we hear about, and the real ones is quite large at our place…"

『That’s right… it was quite a shock to me when I first heard I was the fiend of the Walt House, you know.』

As I exchanged some idle banter with the Sixth, I considered the possibility of Miranda-san’s ties to my family.

2 - The Library of the City of Scholars

Our general objective in Arumsaas was to gather knowledge.

In the prided『Library』of the city of scholars, it was said that all the world's knowledge was gathered (at least according to the city of scholars itself).

Fitting of their boasting, it was the largest structure in the city. Perhaps because it had been added onto over the years, its structure wasn't set, and the miscellaneous feeling it gave off was quite Arumsaas-esque.

The city mainly consisted of private academic institutions, and there were also a lot of training halls, so I planned to drop by them, but as expected, my goal was the library.

Of all else…

『So this is the rumored library… what a splendid building. I guess I can hold some expectations for its contents.』

The Third was in high spirits.

The ancestors generally lusted for information on new breakthroughs and technologies, but the one with the deepest seated interest was the Third.

Today, Novem and Aria left early in the morning, so I was visiting it alone.

"In order to view the books, I'll need to hand over five silver to become a member, I see."

On the bulletin board posted at the entrance, there was a set of instructions geared towards first time users.

If you were just to look at whatever was open to the general public,

you could get in with a single copper coin as a usage fee.

But in order to look at the books of greater value you would have to obtain a membership for five silver coins, it seemed.

Even so, there still existed books that the city of scholars would never show to outsiders.

“It’s good and all that I have the money, but…”

If five silver was all it took to use it for life, it was cheap.

I took out the money from my wallet and headed to the counter to complete the registration process.

The Second made an observation of the surroundings.

『There’s quite a few young ones around here. When you think of how all these people can read and write, it really reminds me that times have changed.』

Around the Second’s time, just how many of his villagers were literate…

There was no doubt it was less than now.

Living in itself was hard enough, and the villagers probably lived lifestyles that those of this time would call barbaric.

They must have struggled with that issue as well.

The Seventh spoke.

『But it really is amazing. They’re storing nothing but books in this many buildings.』

It looked like he had never visited the place himself, as the Seventh offered his admiration upon seeing the real deal.

However the structure was massive, so when I looked at the map near the counter…

“It’s too large for me to choose something to read.”

While mulling over where to read, I called out to the girl who left the

desk.

“Do you have a moment?”

“… Yes.”

She was a very quiet girl.

Her height was short, and her body’s make was delicate.

As for feminine charms, her breasts were forcefully pushing up against clothing too small.

Her hair was a deep blue, and perhaps she didn’t pay a particular amount of mind to personal appearance, as it seemed to have been put in place swiftly with a hand comb.

Its length extended to her shoulder, and her hair ends were ruffled.

Her half-closed, sleepy-looking eyes were red.

If she hadn’t come out from behind the desk, I would definitely have mistaken her for a child.

The clothes she was wearing were, rather than stylish, giving off the feeling she just put on whatever was there.

She was wearing a shirt and a slightly-short skirt.

(… She really isn’t a child, right?)

While thinking something rude, I posed my question.

“I want to get here, but what path should I take for that?”

As I pointed at the map on the board, she stared at it, before staring at my face a while.

“… I’m also going, so I’ll guide you. That’s also my job.”

“I-I see.”

Looking at the disinterested girl, I remembered the receptionist at the guild. As expected, her treatment of me wasn’t as bad as that man.

And wait, he was looking on us as young, so there was no helping it.

To him, it probably felt like he was guiding immature children.

While walking down the corridor, I started to grow conscious of the silence, so I spoke up.

“Even so, there are a lot of books here. I’ve only come to Arumsaas recently, but as I thought, does this place get many outside visitors?”

As I said that, she monotonously responded.

“Yes. Most people ask the same question. And I’ve always responded to that with, ‘everyone asks the same question,’ time and again.”

Hearing that, my smile became stiff.

The Fourth…

『Her type likes to live in her own world, so even if you’re a little nice to her, I doubt she’ll be swayed, Lyle.』

(No, it’s not like I was trying to flirt or anything…)

To the Fourth, who made an outburst when I just talked to a girl, I’d like to tell him to look at who we’re dealing with.

If I was trying to hit on a girl this young, just what would Novem say… I-I’d like to hope she wouldn’t be rooting for me.

Heading to the place I was guided to, I found a room with a lot of technical books relating to agriculture.

Entering it, I found a small number of people sitting at tables, reading the books, and taking notes.

I had a vague impression that they were frantically studying.

“How devoted.”

“… I would like to ask you to restrain your voice from here on. Even when there aren’t people around you, please don’t let out too loud a sound. If you want to take a break, there’s a place if you go further

down the hall.”

“S-sorry. Come to think of it, do you do lending?

As I said that, she shook her head.

“As a general rule, lending out is prohibited. There are many books whose existences are more valuable than their contents, and those sorts of articles are expensive.”

I nodded and headed towards the shelves.

She followed behind me.

The Third put out a title he was interested in, so I took it in hand to read.

『I want to hole up in this place for a while, but time is… Lyle, make sure you drop your reading pace.』

It seemed my reading speed was fast, and the ancestors even doubted whether or not I was actually reading. I was sure that I was gaining an understanding of the contents, but…

I sat down in an empty chair and looked around.

And I tilted my head.

“… What are you doing?”

“Eh?”

The guide who was supposed to be a staff member took a book and was about to take a seat. She looked at me with a little surprise.

(No, I’m the surprised one.)

After we locked eyes for a little, she sat down and started reading.

The Third was confused.

『Huh~ what does this mean?』

He asked the Fourth, but he was troubled as well.

『As if I know. This must be work, or a break, or something, right?』

Forcing myself to believe that was the case, I took the empty seat next to her and started into my own book.

While thinking I should have taken something to take notes, I flipped the pages.

The library was so quiet that all I could hear was the occasional sound of pen on paper.

I could also hear the sound of footsteps down the corridor, but if I concentrated, those started to not matter anymore.

I spent a while reading while listening to the ancestors exchange opinions.

『If only this were around back in my time!!』

To the shouting Second, the Sixth spoke.

『Ah, that finally spread during my time, so I doubt that was possible.』

The Seventh agreed.

『What's more, a new method was already discovered in my time.』

Hearing that, the Second lamented.

『… Why are you guys' reactions all so light! Isn't it groundbreaking!? Revolutionary!』

The heads of history had differing opinions in relation to technology.

Up to the Third, they really did live through agriculture, so they coveted technology pertaining to farmwork.

But since their stories were different, perhaps the Second was unable to understand the others, so the amount of times he spoke up was low.

Listening to their opinions, all I thought was…

(Loud… well, it does make for an interesting read.)

❼

I finished the book in hand, and it was time so I was going to put it back and return.

But seeing the girl reading next to me… the staff personnel, still reading at this point in time, I was a little surprised.

“… What about work?”

She lifted her head from her book and tilted it.

“Work? No, today’s off…”

Then why did you guide me?

Perhaps she was actually a relatively nice person.

Perhaps she had finished reading as well, as she stood and headed to return the book.

I also turned to return mine, and I noticed that the faces reading around had changed quite a bit.

“It looks like quite a bit of time has passed.”

I had not a pocket watch, so I don’t really know, but from the amount of books I read, noon had probably passed.

I told Novem I would be eating out, so there was no problem in that regard, but still, I was hungry.

There, I heard the sound of a stomach ring out near me.

I felt some eyes fall on me, but it wasn’t me.

And I heard that endearing sound again.

“… Um, are you sure you aren’t hungry?”

I couldn’t stand by not calling out to the girl who returned her old book, and had taken a new one in hand already.

She nodded.

The Third spoke.

『How about you treat her here as thanks? You have the money.』

The one who opposed that opinion was the Fourth.

『Don't do anything that would cause a misunderstanding! In the first place, Lyle already unmindfully confessed to that Aria!』

Hearing that, I was the one who was shocked.

"Eh?"

As I let out a voice, she started to return to her seat.

"…Hah. Well, if it's alright with you…"

I ended up inviting her out to eat.

I heard the Fourth's voice.

『A~ah, he actually did it. She'll definitely misunderstand.』

The Second spoke.

『She doesn't look like the sort of type to me.』

The Fourth snorted.

『I never said I meant this girl. Novem-chan will misunderstand, is what I'm trying to say.』

Hearing that, the Seventh spoke.

『Fumu… Her face isn't bad, and perhaps she has a good head on her shoulders, but I'm a bit doubtful about the others.』

The Walt Family Precepts.

Those were the criterion for wife selection.

Those that cleared six conditions were to be allowed to be welcomed as a bride. Of course, it's also a single truth the family will keep hidden that they were created from the ramblings of a drunkard, and passed on from there.

It seems like the Seventh assumed that Novem would refuse if she didn't clear them. However the Fourth differed.

『… Then if you treated a girl who didn't clear them to lunch, just what would Novem think?』

Hearing that, I ended up wondering whether I was in for it.

(I-it's fine, right… yep, it'll definitely be fine. I mean, it's only lunch!)

While reassuring myself, I ended up leaving the library with her.

❼

【Clara Bulmer】.

The name of the girl with deep blue hair, and red eyes.

When asked, it seems she was doing library work.

She was also registered as an adventurer, and she would occasionally do support work in order to secure her funds to live in Arumsaas.

She took on a request for a temporary staff member at the library, and she would help out whenever it got busy, it seems.

Having ended up treating her at a snack shop along the way, I was able to ask her various things.

"Former student? But you're fifteen, aren't you?"

Being of the same age of me and Novem, she… Clara nodded as she sipped her tea.

"I skipped grades. In the academy meant to teach the foundations, it's something quite standard. There are some who received prior private schooling, and there are personal difference in reading, writing, and calculative abilities."

I nodded, but started to wonder whether or not there were really that great of differences.

Without finding work after graduation, she was apparently an adventurer who did requests for the library.

It was possible for her to actually become a staff member there, but she was busy, so she refused.

When I asked for the reason.

“… It will decrease my reading time.”

It seems it was the same reason as the Third.

What’s more, she held a Support Skill.

“Even when you have a Skill, you work as an adventurer alone? Why not join up with someone?”

I knew it was rude, but I was in the middle of searching for comrades.

I wanted to learn the sort of situation in Arumsaas.

But unexpectedly, she began to go into the details of her own Skill.

“My Skill is to read books. It’s useless in battle, and there are many staff personnel at the library who possess Skills of this sort.”

Skill,【Reading】.

It’s a Skill to read articles, and regardless of whether it be in another language, or in an old dialect, it was a Skill that let one comprehend them.

The Third sounded jealous.

『If only I got a Skill like that.』

The Sixth seemed fed up as he spoke.

『Your skill is the cruelest among ours, but still… it is just as useful, you know.』

Among the seven, the Third’s seems to be evaluated as the cruelest.

I was curious, but I couldn’t ask here, so I’ll try next time.

“Isn’t that an amazing Skill?”

“… If you wanted me to choose between amazing or not, it’s amazing, but there are many who hold the same one. Also, I hate using a Skill to read.”

There’s only point if she read it herself, she says.

But perhaps precisely because she was that sort of person, the Reading Skill manifested.

“Are you sure you should have told me all this?”

Clara said there was no problem.

“I’m not able to read the important books, and Reading isn’t almighty. It’s not like I can always remember what’s read either.”

It wasn’t too much of a user friendly Skill, and there were plenty with it, so it wasn’t considered too valuable a Skill to have.

“What do you do as a support adventurer?”

“… I’m often asked, but what I generally do is carry luggage. While people often assume I don’t have any strength with this build, I can do most standard procedures. There’s also magical support. Lighting up labyrinths, and preparing fires. Procuring water. Those sorts of things are the contributions of support.”

While her small body looked unreliable, she said she would manage.

However, I truly am reluctant to have this girl carry heavy baggage.

Looking closely, her looks were decent.

If she properly set her hair, and changed her clothes, perhaps the change would be impressive.

“… You’re an adventurer as well, right Lyle-san?”

“That’s right. You can tell?”

On my short response, she started talking at length.

“If you’re trying to get information out of me, I’ll give it. Ask as much

as you want in exchange for the meal. However, I'm the type of support that generally doesn't participate in battle, so the amount I can tell you is limited."

She seems to think the purpose of the meal was information collection.

Perhaps that's why she came when invited.

"Then that makes matters fast. Did you not think I was a bad person for that?"

She shook her head.

"Situations are situations, and you were so earnestly reading a book… if I was fooled, then I was the one who made a mistake."

Looking at her lack of tenacity, I could only reply with, 'I see.'

After that, I chatted a little, before leaving the shop.

Clara returned home, and I was to return to the inn, but…

"How rare."

I turned to a voice sent in my direction, and there, I found Miranda-san.

Remembering the Sixth's words, I put myself on guard, and retreated a little.

Seeing that, ths gave a grin.

"You didn't seem to be that type last I saw you, but perhaps you work fast? Make sure you don't make Aria or that side ponytail girl cry."

With a mischievous smile, she displayed cuter traits than her age would indicate.

It felt as if I would drop my guard.

"You're wrong. I just met her in the library, and the meal was… no, it's nothing (I don't really have an excuse about that one)."

Thinking that regardless of what I said, it would be taken as flirting, I stopped denying it.

Miranda laughed.

“It’s a joke. That girl’s Clara, right? She’s famous around here, and I’m sure that it ended with just a meal.”

“Well, the deal was just for a meal, anyways.”

Wondering what it was that was coming out of my mouth, I looked down at the item in Miranda-san’s hand.

“What’s that?”

The brown paper bag, seemed to contain cooking ingredients.

“Ah, this? It’s food. Recently, the people I hired suddenly quit, so I’m out here making a purchase. Even though it’s a live-in job with good wages, they always seem to quit.”

Looking at her troubled face, I proposed that I carry the bag.

I extended my hand, and accepted the two large bages of foodstuff.

“Sorry about that. Right, Right, I’ll guide you to my house. It’s a bit of a walk, but are you fine?”

“I don’t mind.”

“… Hmm~ As I thought, you work quite fast.”

Miranda-san tried teasing me, so I refuted.

“That’s not it!”

I heard the Fifth’s voice.

『So you’re actually going? Well, no matter what happens, you should be able to shake it off, but… just don’t drop your guard.』

Miranda’s House, the Circry House was one that was related to the Walt House by marriage two generations past.

Once the ones concerned parish, the connection grows dim.

However, perhaps she came into contact with me due to some sort of linkage.

(Novem and Aria aren't here, so it's perfect. If it gets dangerous, I can cut my way through.)

The reaction from the Sixth's Skill on Miranda-san was that she wasn't an enemy.

But I couldn't grow negligent.

『Well then, it would be nice if you worried for nothing.』

The Fifth's voice sounded colder than usual.

3 - The Seven Great of the City of Scholars

“… So you were living in a house?”

Having carried Miranda-san’s baggage all the way to her residence, I was slightly surprised upon seeing her estate.

Where it was normal for a majority of the students studying here to live in apartments, she resided in a detached house.

For a noble family with the funding, it wasn’t unthinkable, but that’s only a small portion of them.

Making a bitter smile, Miranda-san looked a little troubled.

“I mean, even like this, I’m the eldest daughter. I’m not being very useful to my House, but I guess you could call it honor? For that reason, they bought me a maoor. By the time I’ve graduated, it’ll probably have been sold off to someone.”

Even when they allowed the Circry’s eldest to study in the city of scholars, they couldn’t have her living in a plain apartment.

Hearing that, the Fifth spoke.

『Well, honor is important in itself. And wait, if they were buying it, and they were going to sell it later, I doubt they had too much to worry about. More importantly, Lyle… how is the reaction from the Skill?』

The Fifth remained alert, and I quietly activated the Skill.

The Sixth’s Skill determined Miranda-san as an ally.

Allies were blue.

Irrelevant people, or those that didn’t think anything of me were yellow.

Those with hostility towards me or monsters were displayed as red.

It looks like Miranda-san didn't hold any hostility.

(Was I overthinking it?)

As I thought that, the Fifth spoke.

『Don't be negligent. There may be a reason that all of her employees quit… hey, go into the estate.』

Carrying the baggage, I followed Miranda-san, who entered first.

It was a house with a yard attached, and the building itself had two floors.

From the outside, I could tell that it had a large number of rooms.

"Is it not too wide to live in alone?"

As I said that, Miranda-san's expression clouded for a moment.

(I wonder what the problem is.)

But she immediately smiled, and shook her head.

"I have a sister. Our place has four siblings, but the youngest daughter, well… her eyes are bad. I came here because I wanted to fix them."

Miranda-san came to this city for her sister's sake.

It may have sounded moving to me, but the ancestor's opinions were the worst.

According to the Second…

『Eh~ atrocious. The Eldest daughter shouldn't be doing something like that. What's more, you're an imperial noble, right? Go off and get married already.』

The Third was the same.

『It's a nice story, but I think she has another motive.』

The Fourth was a little mindful of her.

『I think she's a nice girl, but it's her parents fault for allowing it. The all-important eldest, right? From her appearance, she's a pretty, and sociable one, so go marry her off to a house you want connections with.』

The Fifth was cold.

『The youngest daughter has bad eyes? Then isn't this just the family's way of kicking her out? The eldest just tagged along to look after her, and she's probably just arbitrarily giving a reason. Well, perhaps she's actually serious, herself.』

The Sixth.

『… Well, it's nice to care for your sister. It's a good thing to get along with your sisters.』

Remembering our questionable conversation from last time, perhaps various things happened between him and his siblings.

While sympathizing with him a little, I heard the Seventh's opinion.

『It isn't rare for a family to distance a child with problems. In my time there were many a rumor about confinement, and deaths by 'natural causes'. Though strange rumors do come out even if it really was natural.』

What a dry family.

I need to remember to be sympathetic myself.

(She's a good person.)

Her composition to work hard for her younger sister was leagues away from my sister Celes.

(I'm a little jealous. I wanted a sister like this. If I had one, then a little different… no, I guess it wouldn't change. It would just increase the number of people who were cold to me.)

A monster that can warp its environment.

Even my kind parents would never look at me at all.

“A touching story. I wish I had a sister like you.”

As I praised her, she started pushing me.

“Oh! So you’re already gunning for me? Well, I’m a bit doubtful over whether or not I’m that good of a sister. What about your siblings, Lyle-kun?”

I skillfully put on a front, but anxiety came over me as I gave a simplified explanation.

“I have… one younger sister.”

I’m not sure if she asked knowing full well about it, or she simply wanted to ask.

I couldn’t determine anything like that, but the Skill continued to mark her out as blue.

“Nice, aren’t they; sisters! They’re cute!”

“R-right.”

As I forced myself to go along with the conversation, perhaps sensing something, she didn’t talk any further.

It’s possible she guessed the situation.

I followed her to the kitchen, and placed the foodstuff on the table.

From what I’d seen of the mansion so far, it was managed quite nicely.

Besides the fact that there were handrails leading everywhere, it was quite standard.

“I heard that you had no employees, but it’s quite clean.”

“Ahahah… it’s because they only quit two days ago.”

Meaning that once the days passed, she would have no choice but to clean it.

Once the academy's classes and tasks came to an end, she would quietly do the housework.

I wanted to ask for the reason why they quit, but thinking that was going too far, I stopped.

"Still, with a dwelling this vast, it must be quite a trial to clean it."

In the house I once lived in in Dalien, novem made sure the place was cleaned up nicely.

While I thought Novem was amazing, upon seeing a mansion several times the saze of that one with only two girls in it to…

I honestly thought it would be quite a trial.

"That's right. But I did learn housework to an extent…"

It looks like Miranda-san has her troubles.

At that moment…

"Onee-sama, is there a guest?"

I turned around to find a girl standing there. She stood while clinging to the doorway, but I had a sense of discomfort trying to figure out whether her eyes were really resting on us, or not.

The Third spoke.

『Isn't this the sightless younger sister?』

The girl, who was still quite small, had pale violet hair. The waves in it resembled Miranda-san's.

Her golden eyes were looking in our direction, but because of her vision problems, I get the feeling they weren't focused on us. She groped around in the air as she drew closer to us, but Miranda-san hurriedly ran over to her.

"Shannon! I told you to stay in your room."

"I'm sorry, onee-sama… more importantly, is it a guest? A man at that?"

Perhaps from the conversation, or the atmosphere, she sensed it.

I tried introducing myself. To test Miranda-san, I also tried putting out my family name.

I kept the Skill up to see if she developed any hostility.

(What will happen? Will she raise her guard?)

“Pleasure meeting you, milady. I am Lyle Walt. An acquaintance of Aria. Today, I just helped carry baggage, and stopped by while I was at it.”

Saying that, I directed a smile, for argument’s sake.

The Fifth and Sixth reacted upon seeing the girl known as【Shannon Circry】.

『Well that’s quite a…』

『I wonder if it’s that thing called blood.』

I found their reactions curions, but I wasn’t able to ask, so I continued to observe the sisters.

Shannon looked at me, and only there did I get a strange sense that I was actually being watched.

“… So that’s… how it is. Thank you very much, Lyle-san. I am Shannon Circry. Miranda one-sama’s younger sister. I’m sorry, but my eyes hold an impairment, so I can only give you this sort of treatment…”

Shannon cast down her eyes, and Miranda called to her.

“I-it’s fine, Shannon! Lyle-kun isn’t mindful of something like that.”

Saying that, she turned to me, so I nodded.

“… Thank you.”

When I said that, I directed a smile at her.

For only a moment, Shannon’s blue indicator symbol turned to yellow, and then to red, but it soon went blue once more.

Miranda-san didn't change at all.

The one who reacted upon hearing the Walt house's name was Shannon.

❼

Having received tea in the kitchen, I waited for Miranda-san to return after dragging Shannon off to her room, and was able to ask about the city of Arumsaas.

What I heard from her was mainly about the campuses.

As a currently active student, perhaps she held different interests, but I was able to get different information from her than from Clara.

"The academy's seven great? Are they amazing people?"

As I asked about the『Academy's Seven Great』, she started giggling to herself.

It had come out in her story, so I was curious, but it seems they weren't what I was thinking of.

"They're definitely amazing, but they're not the type of people you may think them to be. They're outrageous people from the academy's history since the time it first opened. There are even people long dead among them, and I guess there around three left now? One of them retired, so I guess there's only two left in the academy."

From the start of the academy, the seven problem children who raised their names were known as the seven great, apparently.

"Are they simply problem children?"

As I said that, Miranda-san added on.

"They were normally quite prodigious. Perhaps its because they were so prodigious, that the academy was so troubled. Quite a few of them were first-rate magicians, and the achievements they left behind were amazing… it's just that they didn't have restraint in

some areas.”

That thing called genius?

They probably had different senses of value than normal people, and were thus misunderstood.

“What sort of people were they?”

“The one I know of it the one who became a professor at a young age, 【Damien Valle】. The other one’s in the city of scholars’ congress, so I’ve never met them. Damian Valle… 『Damien the Doll User』.”

With a moniker like that, he may actually be an amazing person.

I tried asking about him.

“It’s a strange one, but he’s quite skilled, and his specialty is in the use of a magic called 【Golem】, I heard. His personal Skill is also based on the control of Golems, it seems, but anyways, he’s one with a passion towards his research. Since he’s a professor, he’s on the teaching side, but regardless of that, he immerses himself in his work, and he’s received punishment from the higher-ups several times. Now, he does do lectures, but he’s famous for showing no motivation in them.”

What a man.

He was proficient, but he knew no end in that, so he became quite a troublesome one.

“Then why didn’t he just become a normal researcher?”

“… As a professor, his research funds are completely different. That’s why he became one, it seems… but the contents of his research are just a little inhuman, so he couldn’t go about quitting the position himself. I mean, it’s considerable that he wouldn’t even get any funding otherwise.”

Just what sort of research is he doing?

As I thought that Miranda-san had her face a little flushed as she

went into the explanations.

“Well… do you know about autonomous dolls? Not the ones made with Magic tools, but the existences close to humans that were made with an ancient technology. He plans on restoring them, it seems.”

“They weren’t created with magic tools? That’s quite rare in this time, or how should I put this… does autonomous dolls mean they’re dolls that move of their own accord? By something like clockwork?”

What I imagines was a to that circled around through clockwork.

But Miranda told me that was wrong.

“That’s a little… it’s one of the reason he’s known as a pervert, but what he wants to make are humans themselves. According to the man himself, he wants to『Make the Ideal Woman』. ”

Even I was shocked at that one.

While thinking he was a little too honest to his passions, I conceded that perhaps it was a dream-like scenario for a man.

It’s just that…

(Yeah, I’m fine with Novem.)

“What an amazing person. No one tries to stop him?”

“It’s an ancient autonomous doll, you know? If he succeeds in reproducing them, then it seems the city of scholars can expect quite some profit. In truth, the man is a genius, and if he cannot do it, then it will probably be impossible for times to come, apparently. His passion is nothing to laugh at. He’s not one of the seven great for show, is what everyone says.”

I understood he wasn’t someone I wanted to get involved with.

“It’s just that, the higher ups are reluctant to see if he’ll succeed or not. So he’s acting as a professor without the full funding. Even if they don’t have his passion, there are many who want to learn Damien’s magic, so he’s got some popularity.”

(Okay, let's never take on any of that man's requests.)

Looking at the clock in the room, I determined that I had long overstayed my welcome. I would feel bad if I imposed on her further, so I decided to return.

"I apologize for having you talk so long.I think I'll take my leave here."

"Ah, so it's already this time. Sorry, it's just been a while since I was able to talk like this."

She attended school, and at hom, her sister, and the housework awaited her.

It was likely quite timeconsuming.

Can she not take servants from her home? I thought that, but it wasn't a problem to stick myself into, so I didn't say anything.

But I was curious at Shannon, who showed hostility for just a moment.

I stood from my seat alongside her, but she suddenly made an expression as if she had remembered something.

"Ah, right!"

"… What could be the matter?"

❼

Having returned to the inn, I called out to Novem and Aria, who had been dropping by the real esate agencies.

Having finished dinner, before we were going to spend our time in leisure, I told both of them of today's happenings.

I told them about Miranda-san's proposal.

"… Are you serious about that?"

Aria's expression was serious.

“I think doing as Lyle-sama wishes is for the best.”

Looking at Novem’s smile, I remembered the lunch I had with Clara.

(Dammit! It’s because the Fourth said something like that, that I can’t help but be conscious of it.)

If she learned hat I had eaten lunch with a girl, just what would Novem think?

I somehow avoid the topic, and presented the information about adventurers I got as part of the information I obtained from Miranda-san.

And the final topic I presented was…

“Miranda-san was serious. She said she would be thankful with us there, it seems. She was anxious with no one but her sister around, and if it was Aria, then she was already acquainted with Shannon, she said.”

Her proposal was that, if we hadn’t found a place to stay in Arumsaas yet, to come to the mansion.

From my point of view, I was unsure of whether or not I should take residence in there as a man.

Even if the public order was good, it was dangerous.

Miranda-san said it would be convenient to have a man around the house.

I was worried about what Shannon’s reaction was, but the ones who approved the matter were the Fifth and Sixth.

The rest were opposed.

As a result of our discussion, I was to leave the decision to Novem and Aria. That calmed them down.

“I’m a bit opposed to it. Miranda-san, and Shannon-chan, right? As a man, I think it would be strange for me to be living with them. It’s just that our rent would be the cleaning and laundry of the mansion, meaning we would be taking care of housework. Though she said

not to mind it if we were busy.”

I’m thankful to be able to live there just by maintaining the place.

They did have rooms, and so our only real expense would be food, I guess? Miranda-san said she would cover that, but I was seriously reluctant to have her go that far.

Aria was perplexed.

“Just the two of them? What about their servants!”

“No idea. Do you think I could ask something like that? Why did everyone quit? She said that a number of them quit, so I think there’s some sort of problem, though…”

But looking at Miranda-san, I couldn’t see that there was anything like that.

The one that kept me wary was Shannon.

(… It couldn’t be that…)

Aria started voicing approval.

“I-I’m in agreement. We’ll have less monetary worries, and all…”

As her attitude suddenly changed, the Second clicked his tongue.

『This girl freaking changed her opinion at the drop of a hat.』

The Third laughed.

『You really hate Aria-chan, Second. While ‘m personally opposed, it looks like the Fifth and Sixth have something on their minds, so I think it would be fine to go along with it. Well, it all depends on Lyle, though.』

The Fourth was…

『You’re just fine as long as you can go to the library, aren’t you?』

The Fifth spoke.

『If possible, I would like you to go along with Miranda’s proposal.

From my point of view, she's also my descendant, and she's more of a decent person than the others, I guess?』

The Sixth told me.

『Lyle, my words may seem like someone else's problem to you, but I'd like you to take up her offer. It doesn't look to me that the Walt House's hand is at work there, but there's something that's been bothering me.』

This thing bothering them was something neither the Fifth or Sixth would put to mouth.

Rather than living at the inn, taking residence in the mansion was something I was grateful for, money-wise.

"What about you, Novem?"

When asked, she thought for a moment, before responding.

"Miranda-san, was it? Her sister is with her, but her eyes are impaired… I'll have to confirm this. I understand. Let's try living together so I can make my judgement."

There was something about her response that caught me up.

"What sort of judgement is that?"

"Eh? As I was saying, to see if they're fit to partake in Lyle-sama's harem operation. I mean, it looks like you prefer larger breasts."

On Novem's misunderstanding, Aria reacted.

No wait, this is the first time I ever heard that I was thought of as a large-breast lover.

"You! You were still thinking of such thinngs!? After saying you were unrelated, or had no interest or other things like that!"

I hurriedly rushed to correct the misunderstanding.

Novem continued to giggle to herself on the sidelines.

"W-wrong! That's definitely wrong! In the first place, the one who

proposed it was Miranda-san, and I didn't have any input! Novem, why not say something about it!"

Putting her hand to her dace, Novem tilted her head, and spoke.

"Let's see, If they successfully pass through my discernment, then all will be good and well for you, Lyle-sama."

I covered my face with both hands, and screamed out.

"WROOOOONNNNGG!!"

Quietly, the Fourth muttered.

『Novem-chan… are you sure she isn't doing this on purpose at this point?』

I didn't want to believe that she was actually quite dark under that, so I couldn't accept the Fourth's opinion.

Novem is a good girl. She definitely is!

4 - Adventurer' Circumstances

There is a labyrinth managed by the city of Arumsaas.

They make sure a large quantity of monsters don't emerge, and manage it so that adventurers are barred from entering the deepest chamber.

The labyrinth's defining characteristic was the restrictions placed on the adventurers challenging it.

It's not like everyone desired for it, but there were some times when they had to challenge it even if they didn't want to.

For Arumsaas' guild that conducted management of the labyrinth, with the monster materials and magic stones, and other treasures brought forth by it, it was a valuable source of income.

And in the labyrinth they managed, a set number of adventurer had to perpetually go down, and lessen the number of monster.

That means…

"The right to challenge a labyrinth?"

Having stopped by the guild, the three of us, me, Novem and Aria, looked through the various bulletins stationed around before finding on with that title.

The contents… no, rather than that, there was a request for parties that wanted to obtain that right, and a search ongoing for parties that wanted to challenge the labyrinth.

It was a request directly put out by the guild.

Aria tilted her head as she looked at it.

"You need a special right to challenge it? There was nothing like that in Dalien."

In Dalien, they generally didn't have the power or knowledge to

manage a labyrinth, so they handled them by sending out masses of knights or adventurers wo clear them.

Labyrinths had a nature where they would gradually grow deeper, and after a certain point, they would spit up a large quantity of monsters before vanishing.

But if the amount of monsters inside it was kept low, it would continue to grow deeper, and larger as a labyrinth.

Novem looked at the specifics of the request.

“It looks like this is how Arumsaas conducts management. The Party requirements are… at least three on the front line, two in the rear, and one support, it seems. It’s impossible for us.”

In our current state, we’re operating with just the three of us.

We’re mainly going out to defeat monsters, and selling their parts for profit.

I heard a voice from the Jewel.

It was the Fourth’s.

『The rights also come with an obligation. There’s no need to push yourself to challenge it, but that doesn’t change the fact that you’ll need to gather personnel… Lyle, move with the intentions of assembling at least a party of six.』

I gripped the Jewel in response.

It was my signal of, ‘understood’. When there were a lot of eyes around, I couldn’t really let out my voice to talk to them.

While I could hear the ancestors’ voices, my own thoughts don’t reach them.

“… Let’s try gathering six people. Of course, we’ll need young not-so-patriotic ones, though.”

I get the feeling the conditions are slightly harsh.

There are many adventurers fine with leaving their homelands, but

there are many others besides us searching for young adventurers with good future prospects.

Aria looked at me, and mutter.

“And in the end, you plan on finding yourself some cute girls, don’t you.”

She’s been picking fights with me a lot lately, so I responded.

“Whether they be male or female, if they’re skilled, then I’ll invite them as our comrades!”

But Novem was…

“No, if possible, let’s fortify our party with women. It would be troublesome if various problems came up, and I’ve heard that many quarrels can come out in mixed gender parties.”

She denied it all too naturally.

Since the start, no matter how many times I told her I didn’t want a harem, she would gently change the subject.

I really can’t tell what’s going on in her mind.

(Even if I do build up a harem, will Novem not get angry… this makes me feel really lonely, you know.)

It would be a problem if she was too jealous, but not being jealous at all for the sake of the person she likes leaves quite a lonesome feeling.

Aria spoke up, as if she had just remembered something.

“Ah, I’ve heard about it! In places with few men, the women often fight, and in places with many men, the men fight amongst themselves!”

Finding satisfaction in her own words, she nodded a few times.

There, having heard her, a single adventurer stifled their laughter before offering a correction.

The hooded magician-like adventurer gave her a more detailed explanation.

“Girly, that’s a little wrong, you know.”

From his voice, I could tell he was a middle-aged man. He was likely Aria’s elder, so she revised her tone of speech.

“What do you mean by that?”

According to him…

“Generally, love and such relationships don’t break out between adventurers. They often go off with ordinary civilians. I mean, it’s quite a dangerous job. They don’t want to have to see their comrades faces even after they finally return. Also, their opinions often clash on various things during jobs.”

“I-is that how it is?”

“That’s right. There’re even times they’ll have to stay together for a job. Regardless of male and female relations, they’ll see the parts of each other they don’t want to see. For a man who still wants to keep up his pretty illusion of women they run off to civilians or harlots. For women, rather than the men who don’t treat them as females, a civilian is more appealing. Oh, this is just the standard pattern, so I’m not giving any absolutes. But there are a lot of adventurers like that.”

Hearing that, I recalled Zelphy-san.

(I do believe the one she was marrying to was a common man. Even when it seemed she had many adventurer acquaintance, as I thought, did she not want to marry into the same business?)

Rondo-san was dating Rachel-san of his party, so it’s true that it isn’t an absolute, I gess.

However, I was able to understand what was the general case.

“Isn’t it bad not to treat them as women…”

Aria tried to offer a rebuttal, but he continued on.

“Man and women are all risking their lives all the same. In a place

like that, would you like to be protected, or perhaps underestimated for your gender? It's simple manners to treat them all as adventurers."

Hearing that, Aria closed her mouth.

She had cone through such an experience, so she couldn't say anything in return.

Novem offered her thanks to the adventurer who provided the information. Aria hopped on as well…

"Thank you for your kind explanation."

"T-thank you."

I also give thanks, and the hooded man went off with a request form to the receptionists.

I thought that most of the residents were apathetic, but I guess kind ones exist as well.

"… Well then, with the fact that love affairs within the party aren't recommended in mind, I believe it's time for us to seriously focus on gathering members. Should we put up a flier first?"

The standard method was writing down all the necessary information, and putting it out with a recruitment call.

But the other two reacted badly to that.

Aria spoke.

"We'll be doing an interview or something, right? Like going out hunting as a temporary party memper or something? In that case, wouldn't it be better to approach tem from our side?"

Novem was the same.

But her opinion on the matter wasn't of any use.

"There's also the method of having the guild introduce them to us, but it has to be a woman who fulfills the Walt Family Precepts. Interviews are good and all, but as I thought, I'd like to confirm them

with my own eyes first.”

Yep. Let’s not use her view as reference.

“Okay, then we won’t put out a flier, and call out to them from our side.(We still have time, so it’s fine to leisurely search for them too. I guess it’s better than rushing and failing.)”

After we stay in Arumsaas a while, the amount of adventurers we talk to should increase.

Or we could also call out to a newbie and advise them, plucking them before they grow.

We received precise instruction from Zelphy-san in Dalien, so we should be able to teach the basics.

Using that, we could teach the foundations of adventuring, and earn some favors.

“Then let’s get motivated, and start earning for today.”

As I said that, and headed to the receptions desk, Aria spoke.

“The one with the least motivation is Lyle, though…”

❼

After we left the city, I used my Skills to confirm the position of monsters.

The Fifth’s and Sixth’s really are convenient.

Where are the monsters?

Where should we fight them?

How many will we have to fight?

It made it simple to set up plans.

To get to the places where monsters gathered, I was able to use the Fourth’s Skill for swift movement.

So as not to leave the other two behind, I used the Second's Skill to raise their speed as well.

In battle, even if we were at a disadvantage, we generally didn't have a problem.

When we were surrounded by goblins…

"Lyle-sama! There are two coming at you from behind!"

When I heard Novem's voice, I activated the Second's Skill to sense the enemies approaching my back.

While turning around, I locked my sabre with their weapons, and used my left hand to draw my reserve sabre to take one out.

Using the first goblin corpse as a Shield, I locked down the second one's movements, before impaling its head on my sabres.

Finally, I used Magic…

"Lightning!"

Electricity rains down on the goblins all around, charring them black.

Seeing that, Aria shouted out.

"D-don't scare me like that! If you're going to use it, at least throw out a warning!"

My Skills already give me the positioning of enemies and allies, but Aria said she found the burst of magic suddenly coming at her from behind to be scary.

(I'm pretty sure I already explained it, though…)

Does that mean our coordination in battle is still immature?

Looking at the battle, the ancestors gave their evaluations.

The Second level-headedly…

『Lock them down before they can surround you. Even if you know you can win, don't get yourself into that sort of battle if you can avoid it.』

The Third leisurely…

『Hey, het, this is also a sort of experience. It's hard to fight when surrounded. He's got to learn that one in real battle. It's just that I'm doubtful of whether Lyle was actually able to grasp that or not.』

The Fourth spoke.

『For now, you'll just have to fight enemies you know you can beat, and polish your coordination.』

The Fifth was of the same opinion.

『If Lyle's Skill, 【Experience】, were to be used on the entire force, and everyone was able to amass experience all at once, won't the coordination reach a higher level sooner? I mean, rather than for Growths, it was a Skill for gaining a large amount of life experience, right?』

The Sixth found my actions to be rash.

『Don't make light of an enemy you can defeat. You may pay for that with your life one day, Lyle.』

The Seventh was the softest.

『But with Lyle's aptitude, he can easily cut through this much. While it may sound natural, his lack of numbers is detrimental, though.』

Right.

Due to our current lack of numbers, we can't just move as we want.

We had no one to protect our baggage, so after collecting magic stones and monster parts up to a point, we would have no choice but to return.

Even if we knew we would have to become more accustomed to battle, we couldn't go as far as to discard out sources of income.

Avoid unprofitable actions, is one of the important principles of adventuring. We weren't doing this in order to fight. It was in order to live that we worked as adventurers.

(I do want experience, but I feel bad for dragging the two of them around for nothing but battle.)

There's also Novem and Aria.

I couldn't conduct battle thinking of only myself.

The Second started into his assessment of today's job.

『Generally, with only three, this is about your limit. If you got a support, or perhaps a front or back line that could fight, it would likely be much different, but… well, that's the current issue anyways. It's not like your earnings will suddenly explode the moment you get a new recruit or anything.』

(… So it won't.)

Yes, if we suddenly got a new member, our earnings won't rise so easily.

Training, coordination.

There would be a need to spend time polishing all of those.

(Is there no promising candidate out there?)

I know I'm being selfish, but I couldn't help but wish for that.

❼

Having returned from our work, we washed off the sweat and blood at the bath house near the guild, before returning to the mansion.

We ended up taking residence in the property the Circry House possessed in Arumsaas, and obtained a lifestyle where rent was unnecessary.

When we entered, Miranda-san greeted us.

"Welcome back~."

It wasn't bad to have someone greet us, I thought as I stepped forward, but…

“Fugoh!!”

“L-Lyle-sama!”

“Ahah Ahahaha!!”

My feet suddenly slipped, and I collapsed in the entranceway.

Novem ran over to me, and I borrowed her hand to stand.

Aria burst into laughter upon seeing me fall.

“W-what? Was there something to make me…”

As I sat down on the floor, I found a fluid spread over it.

“Hey, are you alright? Ah, this is…”

Miranda came over, and touched the floor with her hand.

“Come to think of it, I did drop some eggs on the floor. But that’s strange. I’m sure I did a decent job wiping it away… ah, sorry, Lyle. Are you hurt?”

To be honest, it hurt, but if I were to say that to an apologizing girl, I get the feeling the Fourth would be outraged, so I held it in.

“No, it was my negligence. I’m fine. And wait, Aria! Aren’t you just a little too happy!?”

Looking at the girl holding her stomach and laughing behind me, I saw that her eyes had become teary.

I heard a fed up voice from the Jewel.

It was the Second and Third.

『Lyle, you really need to be more aware of your surroundings. Perhaps we really have to work on that one.』

『Right…』

Novem seemed fed up as well, but that was towards Aria.

As I thought, Novem is my ally.

“Aria-san, isn’t that a little cruel?”

“Sorry, sorry. I mean, that was an amazing slip… just remembering it is…”

It seems there was no stopping it, an she frantically attempted to endure her laughter.

I stood up, and walked into the mansion. \

Novem supported my body, and Aria followed behind.

Miranda-san began the cleanup of the floor.

“I’m really sure I wiped it, though…”

She seemed a little perplexed, but we had our baggage with is, so we wanted to leave our equipment in our equipment in our rooms.

I entered my room.

We had separate ones, so our paths split. Next to mine was Novems, and Aria’s was next to hers.

But…

『GyaaAAh!』

Aria screamed out, so we rushed to her room.

“What’s wrong, Aria… bufuh…!!”

There was the form of a girl with a pot stuck over her head.

I was worried for a moment, but she seemed to be alive and kicking, so I laughed.

“That’s incredible, Aria! Could it be that the moment you opened the door, the pot on the shelf fell and came down on you? That’s close to a miracle, isn’t it! What’s more, that previous scream wasn’t girly at all, you know.”

I put my left hand on my forehead, pointed at her, and let out a loud laugh.

Aria lifted the pot, and glared at me.

“Y-you…”

Novem cautioned me this time.

“Lyle-sama, I think you’re laughing too much.”

“I know. But it was just interesting.”

“Lyle!!”

She tossed the pot at me, so I caught it, and shouted at her that that was dangerous.

Miranda-san came to the room, wondering what the uproar was, and looked at the shelf in Aria’s room. This time, she was perplexed as well.

“That’s strange. This pot should have been on the lower part of it, or am I remembering this wrong?”

She asked Aria if she had moved it, but Aria denied that.

(Since people suddenly started living here, have these sorts of happenings increased? Even so, this house sure has a lot of this type of trouble.)

Happenings like these have happened a number of times since we started living at Miranda-san’s mansion. I found it mysterious.

I thought that it was perhaps Miranda-san’s ill will, but her reaction from the Skills remained a hostility-less blue.

(The blind Shannon? I don’t think she’s actually capable of that…)

As I seriously wondered whether the manor was haunted by a ghost or something, the Fifth spoke.

『Well, well, well, it seems that some punishment is in order.』

To whom?

(Not me, right?)

With a slight ominous premonition in mind, I touched the Jewel.

But there was no response.

The Fifth didn’t voice his concerns there.

5 - Clara Bulmer

"… I see. My condolences."

In one of the rooms of the library, I was alone with Clara.

It wasn't a popular selection, so few people stopped by it.

There's the fact that the books shelved here were geared at children, but also that kids didn't come to the library that made its popularity decline.

Arumsaas wasn't called the city of scholars for nothing, and books were sold in large numbers. Picture books were among the sort that were easier to obtain.

After coming here, and reading through several dozen picture books, I tried striking up a conversation with Clara.

The contents were about how I was staying in an acquaintance's mansion, and on how through a lot of troublesome events, I got into a fight with one of my comrades.

One of the reasons I came to the picture book room was the fact that Clara was there in itself. At the same, I was also curious about the books I had never read before.

There were some that intrigued me, and some that depicted stories I already knew.

I extended my hand to the mountain of books on the table.

I continued to read as the conversation continued.

"That's right. Even when Aria burst into laughter at my misfortune, why do I look like the bad guy here… also, it seems our battle coordination's gotten worse than before."

I continued to complain without putting the book down, and like me, she continued to read as she responded.

“From what I’ve heard, aren’t you being overly conscious of her? I have no love experience, but I know of some such precedents from some books.”

“Don’t books and reality differ?”

“There are some written based on fact, and more importantly, based on what you’ve told me, you aren’t hated or anything. If you were truly hated, she wouldn’t be taking such a blatantly unpleasant attitude towards you. She would either treat you like you weren’t there, or would act like you’re it was stressful to her psyche just to deal with you. There was something like that written somewhere.”

While I get the feeling she’s relying on book knowledge a bit much, I wasn’t really one to speak on the matter, so I decided to accept her advice.

“I guess it was before we came to Arumsaas? She was cold, and there was a sense of distance between us. That’s how it was before, but nowadays, she immediately gets mad at me.”

Putting aside the book I finished, I picked up the next one.

“… Was there some trigger? Did you do anything to draw her attention?”

“Not that I…”

As I was unable to remember anything, I heard a sigh followed by a voice from the Jewel.

One line from the Fourth.

『The moon sure is beautiful tonight.』

Hearing that, I remembered. Come to think of it, she acted slightly strange around that time.

“… The moon sure is beautiful tonight. I said something like that once. I mean, there was a pretty moon in the sky, and when I said that while looking at it, Aria started behaving strange.”

Clara stared at me with her drowsy eyes.

Noticing her looking at me, I turned to her as well.

“What?”

She turned her eyes back to the picture book in her hand for a moment, before looking at my face again.

“… Perhaps your reading selection is a little bias. Have you ever read romance?”

I tried to recall something like that, but I don’t think I’ve read any.

What I mostly read while in the mansion were tales of adventure geared at children, I think.

Adventurers rise up, or perhaps a hero stands against a formidable foe. All of them ended with the princess as a bride, and a happy ending.

There weren’t any with romance as the main topic.

“None, I don’t think. No, I’m a man, and those are a little hard to stick my hands into.”

I found some agreement in the Third.

『Ah~ I kinda get it. They exist, don’t they. Those guys that say it’s weird for guys to read oms stuff. I just wanted to read a wide assortment so I ignored them, though. I see, so you were conscious about that sort of thing, Lyle… but there’s a surprisingly high amount of people that read those sorts of thing.』

Really…?

Oh, so I could have read them too, I thought, as Clara spoke.

“In a single romance novel that was written long ago, there was a passage that compared a woman to the moon. The end of that story… no, it would be rude of me to spoil the conclusion. I’ll tell you the title, so try reading it.”

“Eh? After you tell me that much, I can’t help but be curious… if it’s an old book, then will it be a little hard to read?”

“No. It’s one that’s been rewritten into modern dialect, so it’s quite simple. And wait, it’s quite a wide-read title among women.”

Hearing that, I recalled the words the Fourth imparted on me a while ago. He screamed ‘The bastard did it!’ or something of the sort, but could he have perhaps been referring to this?

Meaning the Fourth was a reader of romance novels?

Glasses wearing, and noisy about money, as well as the mediator among the ancestors. I try imagining him reading such things.

(… It’s a bit unfitting, or how should I put it, intriguing?)

But thinking of his attitude towards women, I think it wouldn’t be strange for him to be knowledgeable on matters like that.

“… So I confessed?”

As I muttered that, Clara turned her eyes back to the book.

“That you did.”
“So I did…”

I while passed with us just reading our books.

In my head, I was frantically thinking of what to do about Aria, and the books contents weren’t entering it at all.

Thus spoke the Seventh.

『Just what sort of conversation are you trying to have in the picture book corner, Lyle…』

❼

Having exited the library, I tried peeping into one of the famous academies of the city.

Even from the outside of the school that could be called the center of the city, one could see a large number of youths gathering.

In order to instill their minds with knowledge, in order to instill their

bodies with skills, in order to research…

The difference between this city and others was, perhaps, the clear emphasis this one had on education. Normally, their territory management would be a mess, but along with the students, a large stock of money flowed in from afar.

The fruits of their research birther massive profits, and hold the name of the City of Scholars true.

Of course, the cost of such research is just as massive.

As I wasn't a student of the academy, I could only look from the outside, but looking at the building itself, I was shocked.

While the city gave off a jumbled feeling, only the academy gave off a sturdy feeling, as if it were built as a fortress.

Men and women wearing uniforms chatted back and forth, and I saw some reading books as well.

"So this is the academy… It's quite different to how I imagined."

It was meant for studying, so imagined a narrower space. From the atmosphere surrounding the city, I was sure it would prioritize function over aesthetics.

A similar opinion came out from the Jewel.

The Second…

『Oy, that's finer than the manor I lived in!』

The third as well.

『I'd heard of its scale, but this is greater than I thought. And wait, I get the feeling the city placed high emphasis on this place alone. The feeling it gives off is completely different.』

The Fourth had something else on his mind.

『Just how much would something like that cost? I get the feeling it was quite a waste.』

The Fifth.

『Education surely is important. No, wait, that's the main aspect of the city of scholars, so I can imagine them putting a lot of money towards it… I wonder how the current Weihs territory is faring.』

The Sixth recalled his own time.

『It experienced some development from your time, Fifth, but something like this is beyond…』

In the end, the Seventh…

『There was no point in competing with the city of scholars. If those that learned a field to an extent still craved for more, it was natural for them to aim for this place.』

It seems that my ancestors also valued the importance of education.

But this city was on another level.

(Come to think of it, I don't actually know too much about the Weihs territory.)

I knew its scale from the numbers I saw on paper.

But even when it was my homeland, I knew much too less about it.

There was the fact that I was in something like house arrest, but I left as soon as I was kicked out, and now, I feel it was a tad bit of a waste.

(I should have shown the First the current Weihs territory.)

Just what feelings did these men have when they expanded it, I've gained an opportunity to obtain a slight understanding of that.

And I think of that as an extremely valuable experience.

As I was absentmindedly staring at the building, the figure of an acquaintance appeared at the gate.

A few girls wearing the same uniforms were walking with Miranda-san at the center.

“If it isn’t Lyle. What’s up?”

The two walking beside her looked at me, and spoke.

“Miranda’s acquaintance? Could it be your boyfriend?”
“How nice~.”

Miranda-san hurriedly denied it.

“No, he’s someone living at my mansion, and a friend of a friend!”

Hearing the portion about living at her house, her friends started growing loud.

While thinking that Miranda-san had it rough, I called out.

“Today I thought I’d try looking at the academy. I guess just as some sightseeing in the city of scholars.”

As I said that, Miranda-san responded in a tired fashion.

I think she was worn out from trying to convince her friends.

“Really? I’m not really sure if I’d see it was a tourist spot, but… still, there are quite a few who come to see it.”

As I thought, to the people who stop by the city, the academy was a rare sight.

(There’s its scale, and I don’t feel it was a waste to come see it.)

Miranda-san asked about my plans.

“Ah, right. Lyle, are you free after this?”

“… I’m free. Today’s fundamentally a break for me.”

After work finished, there was always a break planned in somewhere. There’s the fear of someone suddenly undergoing a Growth, as well as alleviating built up fatigue, and conducting weapon maintenance.

The greatest thing to be feared was the elevated spirits caused by Growth.

During that time, people tend to try and do really, really stupid things.

(Well, I won't be having them all too frequently.)

I complained in my heart, while Miranda-san started looking at me with upturned eyes.

"Then I have a small request, but are you fine with that?"

"A request, is it? Well, since it's a favor for my landlord, if it's within the extent of my ability."

The reason I stressed the landlord part was so as to not generate any misunderstandings among Miranda-san's friends.

"Really? Thank goodness! The truth is I wanted to go to the guild, but it's scary there. So won't you accompany me?"

"To the Guild? Are you going to put up a request, or something?"

When a civilian ventured to the guild, it was mainly to put out a request. They occasionally went to purchase monster parts as well.

"I'm just going for the request, but these girls want to buy some materials. I'm registered as an adventurer, for argument's sake. Academy students are often called to complete requests with their knowledge and skills."

I wonder if that's how it works in the city of scholars.

"Then are you not used to the guild?"

"How cold. Unlike you guys, I don't frequent it. There are kids out there who just want some money, or just need to collect some materials for their research projects. When they're admitted into the academy, students also register as adventurers, and unrelated people even go to it in order to erase their registration."

There are many types out there, I guess.

But with all girls, I am slightly anxious about the guild's atmosphere.

(Still, this guild's on the better side in appearance and manners.)

As befitting of the city, there were few ill-bred adventurers.

I won't say there are none.

"Understood. I will accompany you."

"I see! Thanks~."

Miranda-san clapped her hands together, and offered her thanks.

I'd like her to do something about the two grinning girls beside her, I thought, as I escorted the three of them to the guild.

❼

When we arrived, we took care of Miranda-san's business turning in request paperwork first.

Her friends, who came to buy monster materials seemed to be planning on having me carry the bags on the way back.

I thought I may have made a mistake, but I think it would be bad if I messed up Miranda-sans relations with my refusal, so I planned to take up the task anyways.

(Well, I'll just think of it as working towards my rent.)

When we proceeded to the second floor for the paperwork, I found Clara there.

"If it isn't Clara. We sure meet a lot. Is it adventurer work this time?

As I called out to her, she turned to my direction.

"Yes, I heard an interesting request was to be put out… it seems to concern you, Lyle-san."

I tilted my head.

As I was stuck unable to comprehend, Miranda-san headed off to the counter.

From what I can see, the surrounding adventurers were watching

her.

While she is a beauty to draw the eye, it wasn't just men looking at here. There were women as well.

I inclined my ears to the whispers around.

"What sort of request is it this time?"
"If it's a request from one of the seven great, the reward must be great…"
"It's best not to get involved. Be wary."
"It looks like it's true that the man's found even coming to the guild to be a pain nowadays, and he's sending student representative in his place."
"No matter how good the rewards may be, they're always requests that outweigh them."

From the looks and the words… it seems that Miranda-san came to submit the request of【Damien Valle】of the seven great.

As if the receptionist's cold reception was a lie, he was fidgeting.

The Second…

『So it becomes a rumor even before the request's put out? I wonder just what sort of man this pervert is.』

(I don't really want to think about it, or more so, it seems that someone I don't want to get involved with is Miranda-san's acquaintance. I see, so that's why she was knowledgeable about it.)

The one I heard the rumors of Damien from was Miranda-san.

He was a professor, and she a student, so it wouldn't be strange for them to have some interaction.

I finally understood what Clara meant when she said I was involved.

And interesting request was Damien Valle's.

Clara started talking.

"For good or bad, requests from the seven great have an influence on other requests. Large sums are involved, so adventurers fight

over them, or perhaps try to obstruct. In order not to get involved with such troubles, they're here to confirm the request's contents."

"Obstruction, even?"

"Yes, obstruction, well, there are various sorts… for example, if there was a request to transport a precious article, word would spread, and the adventurer who accepted it would become known. If there were bad people, they would target the acceptors, and there have been cases where such items were stolen. Fame works both ways."

It seems there was also precedent where adventurers tasked with collecting large amounts of monster materials were attacked while carrying around those materials unaware.

What a troublesome story.

From the point of view of a solo adventurer like Clara, this sort of information gathering must be important.

While we conversed, a staff member walked out to tack the request form on the board.

(Even to the guild, they're troubled if disputes break out.)

Looking at the clerk's reluctant face, I got that sort of idea.

As I wasn't familiar with Arumsaas, Clara continued explaining.

"Here, the academy's influence is greater than the guild's, so even if they know that unrest will break out, they cannot reject the request. The ones that go through trouble are the adventurers, so here I am collecting information in order to evade crisis."

I thought she just lived in her own world, but it seems that in order to live, she's developed some stubbornness.

(Well, if she didn't she couldn't get on alone, I guess.)

The adventurers all crowded around the form, and I asked Miranda-san for the contents as she approached.

Clara also thought that hearing it from Miranda was more efficient

than looking at the sheet, so she stayed beside me.

“It looks like quite a popular request.”

As I said that with a cynical tone, Miranda-san gave a bitter smile.

“The individual himself is putting it out in all earnesty. But the contents are what they are. More importantly, I’m surprised they figured out I was submitting it in the professor’s place.”

Miranda-san looked perplexed, and Clara explained.

“There are some who actively act as adventurers while being enrolled at the academy, so perhaps the information leaked from there. He wrote a request form to the academy for the funds to put up the request, right? It spread from there.”

“Clara-san? You guys are getting on surprisingly well.”

While she was grinning at me, I asked Miranda-san for the contents of the pinned up sheet.

They were as follows.

… I request for materials from the boss on the Fortieth Underground Level of Arumsaas’ labyrinth…
… Time period: one month…
… Reward: a thousand gold coins, or some suitable item…
… Permission to challenge the labyrinth is given upon acceptance of this request…

“… One thousand gold coins. That’s quite amazing.”

With my previous standing, I wouldn’t have been too surprised about one thousand gold before.

But I’m currently living as an adventurer, and my sense of money is slowly starting to change.

“As expected of the seven great. I’m surprised the academy put together that much funding for him.”

Miranda-san also seemed fed up.

It’s just that Clara-san was making a slightly questioning expression.

The Fourth spoke to me.

『Don’t be fooled, Lyle. It isn’t saying it’ll pay out a thousand gold. It says either that, or something suitable. Look around at the other adventurers’ faces.』

As told, I looked around, to find them all with questionable expressions.

『I don’t think this requester has an intent of paying out one thousand gold. Also, the suitable item isn’t specified. It’s nothing but suspicious.』

I asked Clara.

“What sort of thing is the fortieth underground level’s boss?”

“… The last time the lowest floor was confirmed was five years ago. At that time, apparently fifty was the lowest. In the Arumsaas labyrinth which is set to have a boss stationed every ten floors down, the areas where adventurers frequent to take on monsters are around the tenth to the twentieth floors. This labyrinth is designed to expand out the lower one goes.”

“Meaning?”

“It’s an exceedingly strenuous request. While a majority of Arumsaas’ adventurers are skilled, they focus on efficiency. There are few who would go delve into such a deep land to be found here, when compared to other guilds.”

What about the one who went all the way to the bottom five years ago?

As I thought that, I remembered that it *was* five years ago, so I could imagine various scenarios.

(He retired, or changed homes…)

It seems it was as I thought. Sensing my question, Clara offered an answer.

“The party that discovered the lowest floor was disbanded. I believe one has opened a private school somewhere within the city.”

Hearing that, Miranda-san made a troubled expression.

“Eh? Won’t that make it ridiculously difficult to accomplish? In that case, the professor is going to be irritated for a while…”

Is that a student-like worry? Well, even if it’s unrelated to me, there was a point that made me curious.

“So the adventurer that reached the bottom opened a school… do you know the location?”

“Ah, Lyle, that’s cold!”

Miranda started arguing, so I went around her, and asked Clara.

She nodded, took out a memo pad, and started scribbling something down.

The Sixth let out his voice from the Jewel.

『An adventurer that prodigious opened a school, is it… it’s good that you’re interested, Lyle.』

I think that was praise.

Handing over the memo, Clara offered some advice.

“And about the seven great’s request, if you’re just going to accept it, and nothing else, that may be good.”

“Just accepting?”

“Yes, it gives you permission to challenge the labyrinth, so just by accepting it, those that were unable to obtain the right before can dive in. The labyrinth is definitely going to get lively soon.”

Saying that, Clara departed from the guild.

6 - Shannon who sees Another World

… The mansion was one that the Circry family had prepared to seal away their youngest daughter.

The unseeing maiden,【Shannon Circry】knew that all too well.

The decision of the Circry House to hide away their impaired daughter was still on the more decent side of the spectrum.

(The fact that I'm still alive is my fortune, right… but the fact that I was't killed will someday…)

Sitting in the chair of her room, she was looking out of her window.

It was thought that her eyes didn't function, but that wasn't the case.

The world she saw was different.

"It's warm today."

Sunlight streaming in from the window warmed her body.

Because of the loss of her sight, her other senses had grown sharper. And it wasn't just a sharpening at that.

They had been honed enough to make up for what was lost.

The sound of a person's breathing, and their heartbeat let her judge distance.

She just couldn't see, but she could carry out life like normal.

But she intentionally concealed that.

The reason being it was fun. Everyone pitied her, and became negligent, looking down on her impairment. It was too fun.

And…

“It sure is nice to be able to see the flow of Mana. I mean, that pretty much lets me see everything.”

Her eyes were able to perceive Mana.

The reason her unseeing eyes were able to gain such an ability is precisely because her blindness caused a【Skill】to manifest.

So not only did her lack of sight hone her other senses, Shannon’s eyes even developed a Skill to compensate for them.

She was a girl with what you could call demon eyes.

“Even so, that Lyle man was quite wary of me… he gave off quite a strange feeling. I’d like to drive him out soon.”

From the moment Lyle had taken up residence in the place, Shannon had been irritated.

Desiring a life alone with her sister, Lyle’s party was in the way.

Especially Lyle, from whom she could see seven different mysterious lights. The sort of Mana she had never seen before made her strengthen her guard.

“Even when it had all fallen together nicely, he has to get in my way…”

It was true that Shannon liked her sister, but more than that, her sister Miranda was her toy.

Having obtained a new power, she became able to sense other peoples’ sentiments from their Mana flow.

She had obtained these eyes back when she was still in the imperial capital of Centralle.

It all happened when she saw a single girl.

Even when she shouldn’t have been able to see anything, she perceived a massive mass of Mana.

What stood before her was a girl around her own age. Even so, her Mana was larger than anyone else.

The girl was of a Count House, and one that was tied to her own Circry House at that.

That light of Mana looked as if it was simply drawing in all the lights around it… it was beautiful, and yet terrifying. She remembered feeling entranced by the light.

"… Someday, I'll surpass that. As long as I have these eyes."

It was as if some other entity had descended down on the realm of man.

Shannon had tried greeting the girl but she didn't even turn her way.

Shannon was only seen as a frail sightless little girl.

And that was simply mortifying. It's not that she wanted to be loved. However, having that girl not even turn towards her general direction was as if to speak that she didn't even have that much worth to her.

Even so, the reason Shannon held an interest was…

"Ah, I want to break her already, and make her a doll that can't live without me… I think I've gotten quite a bit better by practicing on the servants."

By watching the Mana with her eyes, she slowly became able to control it.

By extending her own, she could throw other people's mana out of order.

Only she could see it, so no one else could notice.

And controlling those she's tainted was what Shannon tried on the servants.

To Shannon, who could never see before, it was a great help towards expanding her own world.

At the same time, dark emotions began to surface.

"My bright and pretty ideal onee-sama… I want to break her. If I do, then I'll be able to surpass that person someday. I'll become that

person.”

Having seen that person in her own eyes, and having become entranced, her eyes that had been closed for all her life had suddenly awakened in a different sense.

Her amber eyes started to let off a golden light.

“But first I’ll have to make onee-sama into a doll. She has to move to my will.”

With ‘that person’ as her goal, to her beloved onee-sama… Miranda, Shannon began to harbor some twisted emotions.

With an expression of ecstasy, Shannon gazed out the window…

❼

“So the managed labyrinth was a place like this?”

Damien Valle…

Having accepted the request of one of those counted into the city of scholars’ seven great perverts, I stepped into the labyrinth, and whispered to myself.

Unlike the one I encountered in Dalien, thin metal slabs were stuck together and overlapped to form the walls of the maze.

There were some places that gave off a faint light, and I could occasionally see blinking red orbs hung around. The labyrinth they were managing had quite a peculiar atmosphere surrounding it.

“Oy! This one’s a dead end!”
“Hey, hurry up and go lower!”
“Dammit! There are no monsters!”

Just with this request, it was possible to peer into the labyrinth, so there were many like us who accepted Damien’s request.

But there were too many of them, and the first floor was overflowing with people.

The adventurers who regularly went in to fight monsters seemed perplexed, as they headed deeper into it.

(I see, so it was true that the seven greats' requests cause trouble for the surroundings.)

Novem had been prepared to light the way, but she gave up olong the way.

It's because there were countless other such lights coming from those around us, and moving around wasn't a problem.

"It's more than I imagined."

Novem gave a slight wry smile, and Aria agreed.

"Instead of going all the way out of the city's bounds, I heard the monster encounter rate in here was high, so it was popular, but…"

With a questioning expression on her face, Aria expressed the same opinion I had.

When I used my Skills to confirm the surrounding situation, I found all the monsters had been defeated, and the treasure chests opened. On the map that floated up in my head, there were so many yellow dots that it became hard to make out each individual one.

The Fifth offered some advice.

『When you're using Map, keep it on a magnification where you can make things out. If you try seeing everything, you'll see nothing but signals, and you won't be able to see anything. Also, I think you know this, but…』

I gripped the Jewel.

"Novem, Aria, we'll be turning right at the next fork."

"Yes, Lyle-sama."

"Eh, why? Everyone's turning left there."

Aria didn't seem to be satisfied with my direction, but there was a reason I avoided going left.

It’s true that all the monsters had already been defeated.

But it’s not just monsters that held hostility.

Mixed in with the mass of yellow, there were some red signals scattered around.

(It isn’t just us. They’re probably targeting the other adventurers as well.)

Even if they didn’t go as far as killing, there were some who would theft and blackmail to take the items the other adventurers had on hand.

Within them, there were some where entire parties gave off a red signal.

The reason we’re avoiding those sorts is because we’re merely a party of three. What’s more, we only have one man among us.

(It really is troublesome to be understaffed.)

At times like these, that would likely draw us into trouble.

I confirmed how congested the traffic was, before telling the others to turn back.

“Let’s return for today. It’s not like we need to push ourselves to earn, and it will probably calm down soon enough.”

“After coming this far, it’s a bit of a waste.”

When Aria voiced her dissatisfaction, Novem persuaded her.

“While it’s true we’ll likely encounter monsters if we press on further, when we get beyond underground level five… the deeper you get, the stronger the monsters become, I’ve heard, so it may b dangerous.”

From my point of view, I could already constantly confirm monster locations with Map.

We won’t be taken by surprise, and I was confident we could actually use surprise to take down enemies easier.

But saying that wouldn't help my cause, so I stopped myself.

"Anyways, there are too many people. I see, so it really does require management, this one."

The Fifth agreed.

『I'll bet there are ones who would try heading to the deepest chamber, to steal the treasure. When it runs this deep, I can't help but wonder what sort of treasures sleep within.』

The Third also spoke.

『I heard that treasure chests are the reproduction of defeated adventurers' equipment by the labyrinth, but is that true? I've been told the corpses get sucked into it for the labyrinth's Growth, equipment and all, but I want to witness it firsthand.』

The Third sought approval from his surroundings, but the Second drew back.

『… Not happenin'. That ain't happenin'.』

『Eh?』

The Fourth also spoke.

『As if we would want to see something so grotesque.』

『Eh? What?』

It was rare for the Third to seem panicked, but right now, returning was my first priority.

"Well then, let's turn back here."

"You know the path back, right? And wait, give a proper explanation of your Skills already. Just how many can you use?"

As Aria was looking for an explanation, I answered.

"… There are eight in all."

Hearing that, Aria's face stiffened.

Novem was… simply smiling as always.

A voice from the Jewel ignored the Second to Fourth, who were joking around, and called out to me.

It was the Fifth.

『Now then, Lyle.』

I touched the Jewel to answer. When I did, he continued on.

『Come to the conference room tonight. Me and the Sixth as well as the Seventh will teach you our Skills. Let's throw in the Third's as well.』

Hearing that, I was a little surprised.

The Third's and Seventh's Skills, that they wouldn't tell me up to now, would be taught to me all at once.

What's more, two other Skill applications… their second levels as well.

(What is this, all of a sudden. The Fifth is… not that sort of impatient person.)

I found it mysterious, but I decided to follow his orders.

❼

Late at night.

When everyone in the mansion had fallen asleep, I sent my consciousness into the Jewel.

While it looked like I was simply sleeping in my bed, only my awareness was brought into the Jewel.

Inside, the ancestors were chatting about various things around the round table.

(I'll bet they can converse in places I can't hear as well.)

While I thought that, I lowered myself into my own seat.

The facilitator, the Fourth looked at he, and clapped his hands thrice to put an end to the idle banter. Everyone quieted down.

『Okay, Lyle has arrived, so we'll start the meeting. Well then, the one who called for you today was the Fifth.』

With his elbow on the table, the Fifth looked at me, and spoke.

『Go teach Lyle your Skills. I'm talking to you, Third and Seventh. From their uses, I don't think the current Lyle will fail at this point.』

A Skill failure was a phenomenon where you overused Skills, and dried up your Mana.

Losing consciousness was the lesser of your worries, and there was a possibility of death.

In the past, when I fought a bandit leader, he had used too many Skills, and blood had erupted from all over his body.

The Third looked at me, and nodded.

『Well why not? But I'll only teach you the fundamental use.』

The Fifth was that was alright, as he turned his eyes to the Seventh.

『… If he's only going to be using it twice a day at most.』

The Seventh placed a restriction on his Skill, but it seems he was going to teach me.

Of these two, it seemed the Third was cruel in nature.

The Sevenths' had an extraordinary nama consumption.

"What sort of Skills do you two have?"

When I asked, the Third smiled as he spoke.

『The Skill name is【Mind】. It's mainly for mental attack and defense. It can also let you show enemies illusions, but if you grow accustom to it, you can bend everyone to your… oh, perhaps going further would be too stimulating for Lyle?』

After saying that much, the Third covered his mouth with his hand.

The surrounding ancestors let out sighs.

The Second drew back.

『You've got quite a bad personality there.』

『Really? It's your turn, Seventh.』

The Third nominated the Seventh.

He stood up, used his Skill, and showed me.

『My Skill is【Box】. A special type Skill. It's convenient, but its mana consumption is extreme, and if you play it poorly, you'll use too much, and lose consciousness.』

The Seventh snapped his fingers, and a magic circle manifested before my eyes.

From it, a bow like a treasure chest emerged.

『The size of the box depends on your Mana. You don't need any Mana to maintain it, but the amount needed to call it is high. Its contents are left in a state with their time stopped, so it excels in storing and preserving.』

It was an exceedingly useful one.

Hearing that, I wondered why he had withheld it, and looked towards him.

There, the Seventh spoke.

『… If you use my Skill once, you can't cancel it halfway through. If you used it carelessly, even death was a possibility. Even if your Mana has increased a little, don't push yourself, Lyle.』

"Y-yes."

While convenient, it seems it was a dangerous one.

Putting off asking about how to use it to later, I turned back to the Fifth.

『Well then, you'll learn the Third and Seventh's Skills in the hear future, so let's get into the main topic.』

"The main topic was something else?"

When I looked at the Sixth, he started clearing his throat.

It seems that it was something difficult to say.

Running out of patience, the Fifth…

『Oy, don't act so embarrassed with that large frame of yours. If you don't say it, I'll do it. Because it's related to me as well.』

A talk related to the Fifth?

While I thought that, the Sixth let out a sigh, before speaking up.

『… Lyle, the truth is those Circry siblings resemble my sister.』

The number of siblings the Sixth had surpassed thirty.

With that many, I have suspicions as to whether or not he had any familial affection, but perhaps he's talking about the Sister he got along with.

"Are you going to tell me to care for her like the First did? Well I do plan on looking out for them to some extent."

I said that, but the Sixth shook his head.

『That's one thing, but the main topic is something else.』

(So you mean you planned to say that as well? I'll be troubled if you get any more women around me! He won't tell me to take her as a bride, right? The Fifth and Sixth had mistresses as if it was normal, so their sense of values in that regard are likely different from mine…)

Thinking it was bad to interrupt him, I continued to listen to the Sixth's talk.

『The older sister Miranda is identical to her. Her personality is also similar.【Milleia】was also quite a nice girl.』

As the Sixth reminisced, the Fifth nidded.

『Among my daughters, she was the most docile, and she didn't backtalk, so it was nice and easy.』

What a dry impression.

Is that not a bit of a cruel outlook on your own daughter?

The Sixth continued.

『It's about the younger one, Shannon, but it looks like she has the same eyes as Milleia.』

"… Her eyes?"

I heard that she couldn't see, but it seems the Fifth and Sizth knew something.

And they were going to explain it ot me.

According to the Sixth…

Shannon had demon eyes.

"Demon eyes… is it?"

『With a Skill, she gained a sense of sight she didn't have before. I'll bet she has her own will, but it was probably something intuitive. Have you never heard of it? When you lose a single sense, your other senses sharpen?』

Hearing the Sixth, I remembered reading it in a book, so I nodded.

『Milleia couldn't see, but through her demon eyes, she could see Mana. On top of that, she was able to reproduce the information she got from her other senses in a way similar to vision. Rather than those that saw through their eyes naturally, she could see much better. Additionally, she could even touch the Mana flow invisible to normal eyes. Quite a troublesome power has been passed down. The mischievous girl is abusing Milleia's eyes.』

The Fifth let out a slightly angry voice.

While he says they were that Milleia's, they're likely something Shannon manifested on her own, so perhaps those are his personal thoughts on the matter.

(Could it be that's how much he cared for Milleia-san?)

"… Where's the proof that Shannon had activated a Skill?"

I could somewhat understand what these two were trying to say.

The mysterious experiences we've had since coming to the mansion were things brought forth by Shannon.

The Sixth revealed his evidence.

『When you activated a Skill, her eyes moved. What's more, she even directed them at the Jewel. Milleia was able to immediately tell when someone was using a Skill.』

While I did think it was nice if the girl's mischief came to an end, these two unraveled something beyond my expectations.

With a serious expression, the Fifth…

『Lyle, stop Shannon. If reforming her is impossible… then smash her eyes.』

… Asked me to crush Shannon's eyes.

7 - Before Clearing a Labyrinth

『If reforming her is impossible, then smash her eyes.』

Having been told that, without my feelings in order, I walked around Arumsaas memo in hand.

It was passed noon, and seeing Shannon's face felt awkward, so I searched for the private school Clara informed me of.

"I think that's overkill…"

What I couldn't understand was how crushing eyes was the correct retribution for petty mischief.

To Shannon, her lack of eyes was compensated for with a Skill, allowing her to sense her surroundings.

Since the Skill acted through her empty eyes, making it so she can't see… crushing them would make her unable to receive information from the environment, even if it was the effects of a Skill.

That was the Fifth's theory.

As I was worrying about it, the Sixth spoke.

『Are you still mulling over it? I can understand how you feel, but that power is too much for that child. It's only because Milleia had a personality like Shannon's elder sister that my pops was able to feel relieved even though she had that power.』

It seems she was a nice person.

With his dry personality, the Fifth thought it unnecessary to dispatch Milleia, so I was able to understand that her personality was likely similar to Miranda-san's.

The Fifth was…

『If you leave her be like that, it won't end with mischief. Now, you should crush all those future monster candidates while you have the

chance.』

I responded in a low voice.

There were a lot of passersby, so even if I spoke, no one turned to look at me.

On the large street, there were numerous signs for private schooling posted up.

Various catch phrases as well.

There were some that reeked of suspicion, and others that drew the eyes.

“Monster candidate, is it? I can’t think of her as being on Celes’ level.”

On my frank thoughts, the Fifth called me naïve.

『She can sense whenever someone uses a Skill, and she can touch the flow of Mana. Right now, she’s likely just using it to perpetrate childish mischief from afar, but if she was in the mood, Milleia was able to even control a person’s heart. That girl was nice, so she used that power to heal the wounded hearts of those with trauma. You get it? It’s something too good for that mischievous kid.』

The Sixth spoke.

『The one who learned of its healing usage was the Circry House head. He fell for her, and talks proceeded all the way to marriage. Both me and pops wanted to keep her close, but considering Milleia’s happiness, we sent her off.』

Perhaps as he remembered the scene, his voice had a regretful tone mixed into it.

But the Fifth was the same as always.

『She married into the notable family of civil officers, the Circry House, so in the end, I think it was beneficial to the Walt House. It was quite an advantage for us to have connections with imperial nobles.』

I guess he won't change.

If you ask if it's fitting the Fifth, it is, but…

The Sixth spoke.

『If she got serious, you wouldn't be able to lay a hand on her. The reason we had the Third teach his Skill was so you could build a resistance against her.』

It was apparently my duty to reform the girl who received a power beyond her caliber.

It wasn't as if she was seeing with her eyes, but still, she could carry out life normally, and was feigning impairment. I found it a little ominous.

I thought it was something I didn't have to know, but her misdeeds against us were escalating by the day.

Right now, there wasn't a problem if the three of us stayed out of the house, but if someone stayed behind, they might be in serious danger.

(She can even lay her hands on someone's mind? No, she uses her Mana to lay hands on it… regardless, if I don't do something about it, her eyes are…)

I don't want to do it. Those are my honest feelings.

But the ancestors are egging me on.

It's not like they're forcing me to crush them. If I can reform her, then I can go in a direction without gore, otherwise, while it's pitiable…

Something like that.

(Why do I have to worry over something like this…)

Why did it even come to this?

If we moved out, would Shannon stop caring about us? In that case… would Miranda-san be safe?

Those sorts of thoughts only furthered my worries.

(In the first place… I can't imagine that child turning out like Celes.)

The Celes I knew of was a true monster.

Just as the First Generation Head called her, a monster whose simple existence could warp her surroundings, and drag them in… that sensation, when I separated from her, I noticed how strange it had been, but while I was there, I never thought it the least peculiar.

I can't see Shannon as a monster of that level.

If you call her dangerous, she probably is, but I felt we were being a little too wary of her.

(Perhaps the Fifth and Sixth are seeing that Milleia-san's shadow on Shannon.)

To me, the one I truly should be wary of was the one who mastered the usage of her eyes, that Milleia-san, I think.

And the one she resembled was…

As I was lost in thought, the Third called out.

『Lyle, isn't this the place?』

"… Looks like it."

I saw a sword training hall with a large sign hung up over it.

From what I heard from Clara, it was the place the former adventurer opened, it seems.

From inside the room, I could hear a shouting voice.

"You're stepping in too shallow!"
"Yes!"
"Do you think you can survive a labyrinth like that!? Let out your voice!"
"Yes!"

While listening to the voices, I peered into the hall.

It seemed to have been opened by a swordsman who fought on the front lines.

Looking at the hall, the Second offered his impression of it…

『… Eh~? That's the swordsman who reached the fiftieth level? Doesn't he seem a little weak?』

The Third agreed, but his opinion was a little different.

『That's definitely how he looks, but could he be hiding his ability? As a fellow swordsman, I'm curious. It's just that, no matter how I look at it, he isn't vey…』

The Fourth.

『That's standard training hall-trained swordplay. No, I won't say that's bad, but… since it was five years ago, did his skills dull from being separated from the battlefield?』

The Fifth.

『Won't it be fine if Lyle fights him?』

The Sixth…

『Right』

Seventh…

『So he's challenging the school? It may be nice if he experienced it while he's young. Lyle, that's how it is, so…』

"… What do you mean that's how it is. Do you guys have some grudges against training halls? Why do I have to challenge…"

I unintentionally grumbled aloud, and the my eyes met a disciple close by. It looks like he overheard me.

"I-it's a challenger! Teacher!! They finally came! A challenger has appeared!"

I extended my hand towards the disciple's back, and opened my mouth. I knew he wouldn't be listening, but I tried giving an excuse.

“N-no, well… that’s wrong…”

I heard the Third’s voice.

『With this, you can’t run away, Lyle. Look, resolve yourself, and show off your sword skills honed by real battle! Don’t lose to some indoor-trained swordplay!』

(… Before I was kicked out, that’s practically what I was doing, you know?)

Looking at the training hall set astir, I ran off.

I fled.

The Sixth spoke.

『What, so you won’t do it? How boring… this sort of thing is actually quite fun, you know?』

As I ran, I shouted out.

“It’s definitely not fun! What sort of pitiful reason is there for me to have to challenge a training hall!? I planned to have them teach me a thing or two about the labyrinth!”

The disciples that rushed out of the hall chased after me.

Perhaps because the blood had gone to their heads, their faces were bright red.

At this rate, it doesn’t look like anything will happen even if I apologize.

Using the Fourth’s【Speed】, I raised my running speed to evade my persuers before concealing myself for a while.

❼

Before returning to the mansion, I headed for the other location listed on the memo.

There, a magician was supposedly teaching the compounding he

learned from his Skill.

There are a large number of people who were able to display their expertise in compounding with Skills, and in the city of scholars, quite a few students held such Skills.

A glass-wearing robed man offered me some tea.

“This is herb tea.”

“Thank you. And well… I want to ask about the time you reached the lowest floor of the labyrinth.”

When I told him my business, he told me to wait until after he finished his lesson.

I waited in the classroom, and listened to his talk as I waited for the time to pass.

“There are a lot who bring that up. But I doubt I will be of much help to you, you know. While it’s true that I went there, I was support. I used magic to light the area, or occasionally conducted healing to contribute to the party.”

“No, I wanted to ask about what I should be wary of… at the training hall, I was mistaken as a challenger, and I was unable to state my business.”

As I said that, he stifled some laughter.

While I thought it strange, he explained the circumstances.

“Like me, he was mainly a baggage carrier. He did participate in battle, so it’s not like he’s weak or anything. He truly has some skill. But he was not part of the party’s main fighting force.”

Apparently, the skilled members left Arumsaas for Beim.

Their numbers apparently numbered close to fifty, but as support was important in the labyrinth, their actual fighting force numbered less than fifteen.

“Now, they may be leading a mercenary brigade, or something of the like. It’s often the case that the profits of that are greater than being

an adventurer. Also, I hear that the amount of skirmishes around has increased lately.”

The man made a slightly sorrowful face.

“The medicine I make is flying off the shelves, so students gathered around me, though.”

From the man smiling wryly, I asked what to watch out for within the labyrinth.

According to him…

“The labyrinth changes based on the location. In Arumsaas’ one, a leader of monsters will obstruct your way every ten floors. The tenth and twentieth floor bosses are often subjugated, but thirtieth onwards are usually left alone.”

“They do revive, right?”

“Yes, in about a week to ten days. But the ones you have to worry about are the bosses that were left unsubjugated. As time goes on, they become stronger. Even when they’re already so powerful, they store up more power, so they can become quite troublesome.”

The man offering me a warning continued on.

“If you challenge it, you may have a Skill manifest, you know? Or perhaps you already have one? But please be cautious when your Skills grow stronger. There are plenty of Skills out there them make it feel like your own power increased more than it did, and there are many an adventure who faced failure because of that. Skills and Growths, those two things are what drive adventurers mad.”

The nice-sounding man laughed, and told me to take it as some advice from a senior in the business.

The Seventh spoke.

『Hmm, he seems to be a good adventurer. Perhaps his opinions clashed with his former party, so he remained in Arumsaas. Clara acted on hearsay, and she wasn’t too knowledgeable on all else.』

It’s not like Clara was in the wrong, and I received some valuable information, so I’m thankful.

“I apologize, but can I ask one last thing?”

“What is it?”

In the end, I tried asking.

For argument’s sake, I did take on Damien Valle’s request, so I planned to confirm it.

“To defeat something on the level of the fortieth floor’s boss, how large of a party would be needed?”

The man thought go a moment, before smiling.

It seems he noticed it was for the request of one of the city of scholars’ seven great.

“So you took on Damien Valle’s request? In our time, we challenged it with close to fifty, and I get the feeling we barely scraped by. The result will change based on just how strong you are, and just how proficient comrades you have, but generally, if you have six, it will be hard once you cross the tenth floor. If you have talent, then wit six, perhaps the twentieth is the limit. Rather than strength, it’s the consecutive battles that make it difficult. If you want to push yourself, it may be possible, but that would make you a failure as an adventurer.”

Strength isn’t everything.

If you don’t earn, then there’s no meaning in it as an adventurer.

After defeating a monster, if you’re going to give up on its materials and magic stones, the man said I might be able to reach the thirtieth floor’s boss.

I offered my thanks, and left the school.

I also purchased some medicine he was selling, and he gave the parting words of, ‘don’t push yourself.’

❼

Along the road back to the mansion.

On an empty path, I tried testing the Fifth's second stage, 【Dimension】, and the Sixth's 【Spec】.

A greater three dimensional map popped up in my head, and I was able to gain a greatre understanding of the presences moving around the city.

After the next turn is a party of two men.

Their ages were in the early half of their teens, and they were playing around.

Having become able to access more detailed information, confirmed the usage restrictions placed on them.

"My sources of information have increased all at once."

It was a good things, but at the same time, a large amount of information was flooding into my head all at once.

I'll need some time before I can get used to it.

The Sixth gave me some advice.

『Don't keep up a Skill you can't use well. Based on the situation, there are times when all you need is a flat plane map. You can't underestimate the Mana consumption either.』

I planned to do just as he said.

But right now, I was testing the Skills, so I continued to walk with them on.

I turned the corner, and found two children playing around.

(… Isn't this Skill considerably amazing? The Sixth told me never to tell anyone of its specifics, and I kinda understood him.)

The one who thought up its usage rules was the Sixth.

And he was also the one who understood just how amazing of a Skill it was.

Of course, the Fifth was amazing in his own right.

Rather than perceiving it, there were some things you would never notice unless you looket at a map.

That's where he came it.

He must have had efficiency on his mind, and whether it be for governing or war, this Skill was proficient.

The Second spoke to me.

『Well then, Lyle, have you resolved yourself? Of course, first you'll need to grasp some definite evidence that Shannon can see.』

If I wanted to try persuading her, I would have to unmask her true nature first.

It was also a necessary factor if I wanted to tell Miranda-san the truth of the matter.

(It won't be nice if I get looked on as a man making false accusations at his landlord's sister. I really don't think I should get involved, but… we're under Miranda-san's care at the moment.)

Novem and Aria generally took care of the housework.

To Miranda-san, who was busy with her schoolwork, it was something she was extremely thankful for.

But from our point of view as adventurers returning from a job, finding food on the table when we returned was on another level.

On top of being able to find rest immediately, it was extremely relieving.

Miranda-san's aid to us was nothing small.

If we left, then Shannon might continue to drive out one servant after another, and Miranda-san would be troubled.

(… I’ll have to reform her.)

I wondered just how I should deal with the girl.

8 - Damien Valle

Having been asked a rare favor by Miranda-san, we ended up confronting someone she wanted us to meet by all means at the guild.

She put her hands together, and desperately pleaded, so we agreed, if it was just meeting them, and the result was…

“So you’re the adventurer party she was talking about? My name’s Damien Valle. Ah, you don’t have to introduce yourselves. It’s a pain to remember names, no… I’m not interested at all, so I forget them soon enough.”

Ruffled hair, the color of foliage, which was kept at a length I could neither call long nor short.

He was wearing glasses, and perhaps they were magic tools, as they looked strangely heavy.

Compared to the Fourth’s glasses, that completed his tidy appearance, these ones gave the young man a sloppy impression.

He looked to be in the first half of his twenties, Despite his relatively short build, he word a large robe, giving him a peculiar atmosphere about him. Despite that the young man had a staff taller than his own height hanging from his back.

Looking at his equipment, I could tell he was wearing an assortment of Magic Items.

But why have I been introduced to this man I didn’t want to meet?

“M-Miranda-san?”

“I’m sorry! I’m truly sorry, Lyle. It’s just that the professor said he couldn’t wait anymore… if he enters the labyrinth and sees what it’s really like, he’ll probably give up.”

Novem seemed a little troubled.

“So the request is to be Damien-san’s guard, and to defeat the fortieth underground floor’s boss? But I never said we possessed skill of that level.”

Aria looked at Damien, and perhaps because he was removed from her image of a researcher, she had received a light shock.

She likely imagined an intellectual-esque male.

Damien spoke.

“I understand that much. While you each seem to possess considerable skill individually, the very fact that there are only three of you limits that, I’ll bet. Still, no one wanted to take up my guard request. It’s irritating, isn’t it? Do you know just how much trouble it was to get that money from those higher up old farts…”

While he was talking to us, the fact that he would look any of us in the eye looked quite rude.

I ignore the man spilling out complaint after complaint, and confirmed the situation with Miranda-san.

The reason we were called out.

“Miranda-san, is this a guild request?”

“It’s a personal request. I want you to guard the professor, and challenge the labyrinth. It seems the adventurers who took up his requests are just rushing into the labyrinth, without even trying to fulfill it…”

To a troubled Miranda-san, Damien spoke.

He seemed fed up as he spilled some complaints about the guild.

“They take money just to put out a request, and they let adventurers with no intention of fulfilling it enter the labyrinth. How detestable. This is why you can’t trust the guild. They should just prepare whatever they’re told.”

Does he even understand how hard that is?

But that isn’t this man’s field of expertise, so there’s a possibility he

doesn’t know about such troubles.

I put some consideration into whether we should take on the request.

(What should we do? Taking it on is fine, but clearing it is impossible for us. I mean, we’ve three people. What’s more, taking Damien of the seven great with us to clear it? I’ve got nothing but bad feelings about this one.)

Even when it would be hard for us alone, dragging along someone who looks like nothing but trouble could prove fatal.

Without consulting either Novem or Aria, I was going to refuse.

But there, the Sixth spoke.

『… Lyle. This is a chance. Take the request. With some conditions, of course.』

(Conditions?)

With a voice no less serious than usual, he started on, and I inclined my ears to his words.

『It’s a good opportunity to separate Miranda from Shannon. They’re demon eyes that can influence even the soul. It wouldn’t be strange if Miranda was already under her control, or was in the process of being put under it.』

The Sixth seemed to be quite cautious with Shannon, and the Fifth agreed.

『If the possibility exists, this is a good time to crush it. When trying to reform her, Miranda’s aid may prove essential. Invite Miranda along here. Then start into full-blown preparations. Tell Damien that as well. That if Miranda participates, you’ll seriously take on the request.』

The Fifth seemed motivated, but it was nothing but danger to me, so I wanted to avoid it.

For our current party, I don’t think we can accomplish that much.

To signal my refusal, I tapped the Jewel with the tip of my finger, and the Second seemed amused.

『So you've got no motivation. Still, Lyle… the Fifth and Sixth told you to make preparations. It's not like it has to be only you guys guarding Damien.』

The Third offered some advice.

Both of them seemed to be having fun here.

『It sounds interesting, so why not just take it up? This will be a good experience for you, Lyle. From my point of view, I think you should take Clara. That girl is a specialized support. It isn't a bad option to try calling out to her.』

(Don't make a game of my trials!)

While I was thinking that, the Seventh spoke to me.

『… Lyle, take on this request. In exchange, make a demand. For the Doll User Damien's【Golem】magic.』

The Seventh held quite an interest in his original golem magic.

The reason made me draw back.

『It's the magic of a man who's even included in the seven great… the information will sell for a pretty penny!』

In the end, the Fourth put all their opinions together.

『Well then, our advice is that you take it on. Your decision, Lyle?』

As I was lost in thought, Aria called out to me.

"Wait, why are you thinking so seriously on it? It's a request that's impossible for us. Why not just reject…"

"We'll take it on. But with conditions attached."

When I said I would accept it, Novem's expression didn't change. It was as if she was under the impression that I would take it up from the beginning.

Aria looked at me in shock.

“W-wait! Didn’t you say we weren’t going to push ourselves here!? With this professor tagging along, there’s no way we can reach the fortieth level!”

Miranda told Aria.

“Aria, you don’t have to think about it that hard. WE just have to make the professor understand how hard the labyrinth is, and…”

Miranda-san’s words were cut off, as Damien looked at me, and called out.

Up to how, his eyes were focused on the area around me, and he wasn’t ever looking at me myself.

I’m not sure what change came about in his psyche, but he was grinning widely.

“Hmm, I was sure you were going to decline, but you’ve got some backbone, kid. Fine. I’ll make the request to you lot. And… the conditions are?”

I recited the conditions the ancestor gave from the Jewel.

“First, I’d like some time. We’ll have to stay over nights in the labyrinth, so I’d like three days of preparation. You should also make some time for that. How about we set the journey’s duration at around a week?”

On my conditions, he nodded.

“That’s fine. But isn’t that a little short? If you’re just taking me along, I won’t pay the reward. At the very least, you have to get to the thirtieth floor for me to recognize you’re earnestly doing your job.”

To me, that wasn’t really a problem.

“I don’t mind. The second is manpower. I’ll look for some on my side, but please convince Miranda-san to come along. If she refuses, we won’t take up the job.”

It’s natural to want manpower, but hearing that, Damien tilted his

head.

“You want this child? I’d like it if you didn’t bring love affairs into work, but… well, it doesn’t look like that’s your intention. Fine. You, you’re coming along. By force.”

Damien said that while looking at Miranda-san.

Miranda-san looked at me for a moment, before telling Damien it was impossible.

“Professor, it’s impossible for me! I have to look after my sister… she can’t see, you know. And we don’t even have any servants at the moment.”

But as I thought, Damien started wielding the authority of the academy.

“If you come along, I’ll give you credit. I’ll tell the academy’s brass of your contributions as well. If you don’t want to… right. I won’t do anything. Yep, I won’t do anything to you.”

As Damien said that with a smile, Miranda-san hung her head.

‘Won’t do anything’ was likely Damien’s special sort of threat.

I added on.

“… The final condition is to leave her sister to a hospital. I want to have a doctor specializing in eyes look at her. We’ll prepare the money for that one.”

As I said it was for Shannon’s treatment, Miranda-san raised her head.

But her expression was perplexed.

That’s because if it could be treated, the Circry House would have already done something about it.

“I get the feeling this girl is a bit affluent, though? Perhaps it can’t be treated? I don’t really care, so I don’t know. It’s just that, if it’s just introducing a doctor, I don’t mind.”

And I went on.

“Can you put out your specialized magic as the reward for this one? The ability to use golem magic. That’s what I request as my reward.”

I thought he would refuse, but Damien nodded quite easily.

Perhaps he had no attachment to his specialized magic, or he thought I was incapable of using it.

“Do you really want it that much? If that’s enough, then I won’t have to prepare funs, so I’m actually thankful. But please don’t complain about it later.”

There, Novem cut in.

“That was surprisingly quick. Do you think Lyle-sama cannot use it?”

Damien shook his head.

“I don’t see why not? All the guys I taught definitely succeeded in using it. It’s just that in the end, everyone starts complaining to me.”

It was his magic that even became his Skill.

Perhaps if others used it, they wouldn’t achieve as great of a result.

But it’s the ability that even earned him his moniker.

The simple knowledge of it had worth as a piece of information, as the Seventh said.

“I’ll also call out to some acquaintances, but it hasn’t been long since I came to Arumsaas, so even if they agreed, I’d likely only be bringing along one. Will your side have no one but Miranda-san?”

When I asked him if he was bringing anyone along, Damien looked up, and started thinking.

“… There are some who want credit, but the usable ones are this kid, and a few, perhaps. I mea, the useful ones are all capable of getting the credits themselves, so they won’t yield to my threats.”

It seems he won't be of any help.

While he gave off quite a damaged impression as a human being, he was one of the city of scholars' greatest oddballs, one of the seven great.

There's no doubt he should be skilled.

"Then three days from how, we'll meet here. We'll be making the necessary preparations up to then…"

As I signaled we would be discussing things as a party, Damien departed from the guild.

While waving his hand, he spoke.

"I've stayed out for nights in order to carry out examinations for my research, you know? I can prepare for myself, so don't worry about that. More importantly, make sure you guys are properly prepared."

He truly seemed to be a selfish one, but rather than him, I looked over to Miranda-san, who was our true intent this time around.

She was looking in my direction, and it seems she wanted to say something.

"Is there something on your mind?"

"… Why did you put my name out? You should know I have Shannon. While it's true I'm the one who set up this meeting, all you had to do was take the professor along into the labyrinth."

She's probably worried about leaving Shannon.

I, for one, can't see this one as a person under mind control. No, could it be that her current state is as such?

(She was kind from the start, so I can't really determine anything.)

Novem consoled her.

"Don't worry, Miranda-san. Shannon-chan is a level-headed girl, and it's a good opportunity to have her see the world outside the mansion. If she stays locked up forever, her world will never expand.

“Still…””

Aria drew closer to me.

Unlike Novem, she seemed to be against my opinion.

“Why did you take the request? Even the magic you want, from that previous talk, it was clear that it was useless to all but the professor!”

I didn’t really want to take it on either, but thinking of Shannon’s case, I wanted to have her separated from Miranda-san for a while.

On top of that, it was a good time to ask for her cooperation.

The Sixth spoke.

『If you try to move to reform the girl while by her side, there’s no doubt she’ll notice. This was for the better. If it’s in the labyrinth, Shannon cannot interfere.』

The Fifth was of the same opinion.

But Shannon’s reformation wasn’t her only goal here.

『Also, it’s about time we have Lyle experience Growth again. Even if you’re to face Shannon now, your Mana restrictions are a bit tight.』

While considering the step where I exited the labyrinth, and experienced a growth, he started saying how it would be bad if Shannon was returned to the mansion, and he started thinking of an excuse to keep the girl away.

The Second didn’t seem to be giving Shannon much serious thought.

『I personally would like Lyle to use this opportunity for Growth as well. Thinking about what’s to come, it will be difficult if he doesn’t become stronger around this point in time.』

The Fourth was of the same opinion.

He seemed to be speaking as if he wanted me to experience a Growth in the labyrinth, but he had some doubts regarding Shannon.

『There have always been those that train in the labyrinths. And wait, is Shannon really as much of a monster as the Fifth and Sixth make her out as? I personally can't see her as anything like that. Perhaps Celes is special? 』

I let out a sigh, and addressed Aria.

"… It's for Miranda-san's sake."

"Miranda's?"

After leaving it at that, we had preparations to make, so we began acting on that.

❼

Three days later…

Having arrived at the guild, I saw Clara with baggage on her, so I waved my hand.

She was carrying bags quite large compared to her body, but she was walking as she usually did.

That scene was looked onto by the newbie adventurers with wonder.

"Right on time."

This time, I put a support request in for Clara.

I thought she would be reluctant, but she immediately complied.

Her reward was something we would be providing.

She was looking at us.

No, she was looking at our attire.

Me, and Novem, and Aria as well had only a little more baggage than usual.

If we planned to challenge the labyrinth, it probably looked to be much too less.

“I think you have too little supplies on you. I told you the required items in advance, did I not?”

She looked a little dissatisfied, and perhaps she was under the impression that we were underestimating the Labyrinth.

I told her it was a misunderstanding, and showed her a wooden box I had placed close by.

“A wooden crate? You plan on carrying that?”

She stared at me with eyes that implied how inefficient it was.

I replied with a bitter smile.

“No, after everyone’s gathered, I’ll show you in a place without wary eyes…”

After I said that much, the adventurers coming towards the guild started growing noisy.

“Oy, Damien’s coming!”
“It’s a parade of dolls.”
“Challenging the labyrinth, is he? Then he should have just gone himself from the start.”

As I stared in the direction of the uproar with wonder, Clara gave an explanation.

Novem and Aria also looked in the direction of the adventurers clearing the way as if they were witnessing something unbelievable.

No, Novem was the same as usual.

“It’s Damien the Doll User’s parade. You’ve let me see quite a rare sight. This much may have been enough to give worth in participating. Damien can control the dolls he’s created, so this sort of thing is possible.”

I opened my eyes wide, and the ancestors were also surprised.

The Second spoke.

『Oy, oy, so this is that Damien guy’s magic!?』

The Third muttered quietly.

『I see. It truly is something that everyone would desire.』

The Fourth as well.

『Looking at this, you can definitely understand its worth. Since it doesn't look widespread, there must be some problem with it, though.』

The Fifth was mildly excited.

『Dolls of steel. If you tried to launch an assault with these as your army, the enemy would be helpless.』

The Sixth looked at Miranda-san, who was walking beside them.

『… So unlike usual, she's wearing clothing easy to move around in. How Milleia-like, and beautiful.』

Just how much did this guy treasure Milleia-san?

He was the only one of them was looking elsewhere.

The Seventh sounded tired.

『That's your problem? I thought your eyes would go to those moving works of armor.』

It was just as the Seventh said.

Full body armor was carrying baggage, and following on behind Damien.

From a glance, it was as if Damien was leading a knight brigade. But that armor wasn't what a human would wear.

The arms and legs were thick, while the body and head were made slender.

The bodies' proportions were quite off.

"… So he can move the dolls he made from scratch to his will. Therefore he's the doll user."

As I muttered that, Novem nodded.

“He’s an amazing person. Is he controlling all of them himself?”

Damien had brought along four bodies.

One of them was carrying a large piece of luggage, and the others had bags on them as well, but their hands were gripping weapons.

Miranda-san, who had been walking beside them, seemed a little embarrassed.

(I told her we would take Shannon to the hospital, so she could go and meet with the professor, but… it looks like I shouldn’t have told her to go with him.)

Perhaps finding challenging a labyrinth to be fun, compared to when I last saw him, Damien seemed much more motivated.

“Greetings, gentlemen! What nice weather it is for us to take on a labyrinth!”

Hearing Damien’s words of high spirits, I looked up at the sky.

It was cloudy.

Aria seemed fed up.

“Weather is irrelevant in the labyrinth, isn’t it?”

Hearing that, Damien corrected the position of his glasses with a finger.

That gesture is one I often see from the Fourth… is what I ended up thinking.

“Irrelevant, you say? How can you be so certain? If the weather was bad, then perhaps there are adventurers who would decide not to dive into it today. The adventurers who often hunt outside the city are often at the beck and call of the skies. And there may be those that frequent the bars with those types. If you want me to go on, if it rains, there may be some who decide to go into the labyrinth for shelter. See, the weather is vital for challenging it.”

While he did have some sense to him, it's troublesome if he goes that far into it.

And to put it bluntly, it's a pain.

That Damien, just like Clara, looked at us with a bit of a serious expression on his face.

"Have you ever challenged a dungeon before, is what I ask?"

Does he think our motivation level is low due to our lack of baggage?

He's probably thinking something like that.

I let out a sigh, and pointed to the wooden box.

"This is all of our stuff."

As I said that, Damien nodded.

"I see… how inefficient. I could have a doll carry it, but that would decrease our fighting force, you know?"

Having been told that, I requested that he move it to a room without people.

If we entered the labyrinth, and moved to an empty, room, I could use the Seventh's【Box】to store it.

"Putting that explanation aside, is this all of us? Okay, then let's go to the labyrinth with all due haste. The first through third floors are crowded with adventurers. It seems there won't be many battles until past the fifth floor, so once we get that far, let's take a break."

On my opinion, Damien nodded, as he smiled.

"Nice. So they'll clear the way for us. It seems that even the guild adventurers can prove themselves useful on occasion."

To be precise, Damien was also an adventurer.

He had a guild card.

I ignored the man who looked like he was having fun, and went over to Miranda-san.

Perhaps worrying about Shannon, she seemed to be unable to settle down.

“What’s wrong?”

“Eh? Ah, well, it’s just Shannon, you know. I remembered the last time we had her hospitalized, and those weren’t the best memories, so…”

We explained the situation three days ago.

At that time, Shannon seemed to have been satisfied with it, but perhaps she had offered some resistance when alone with Miranda-san.

If that was the case, then perhaps Miranda-san wasn’t actually under her control.

The Sixth seemed relieved.

『Good! With this, the first stage is cleared!』

We succeeded in separating the siblings, but my request remained as taking Damien to the fortieth floor, and defeating the boss.

From the Sixth’s point of view, Miranda-san’s safety was probably more important, though.

(Milleia-san… could it be that the Sixth caused you quite some trouble?)

After seeing him this attached, I’m beginning to worry.

Though it’s already something in the past.

“It’s a good opportunity. For Shannon, and for you.”

“I as well?”

She looked at me in wonder, and I presented the excuse I had confidently prepared beforehand.

“You’re both too dependent on one another, or even if that’s not the case, how about you place a little more trust in her? Shannon-chan

is a reliable person… more so than her appearance would imply.”

She had a weak image, but her inner thoughts are pitch black. I didn’t go as far as to say that.

Aria approached me, and assured Miranda there was nothing to worry about.

“That’s right, Miranda. Put a little faith in her. Also, it’s a hospital, so they’ll look after her well.”

It would be troublesome if they didn’t.

That’s why we put out the gold coins.

As it was Damien’s acquaintance, perhaps they were also mindful of us, so they even prepared a private room for her.

Because of that, the expenses were greater than I anticipated.

(It’s the greatest expense we’ve had in a while. I’ve even bought some spare weapons for myself.)

Damien’s dolls hoisted up the wooden box.

Inside was water, and food, and even spare weapons as well.

(Well then, Our real intention is just to persuade Miranda-san, but I want to somehow fulfill Damien’s request as well.)

Damien urged us on.

“Let’s go already. Time is limited, and precious. We can’t be wasting it in a place like this.”

I sighed.

Novem came to console me.

“Let’s go, Lyle-sama. Don’t worry. We’ve prepared enough for this day.”

I nodded, and started tagging behind Dalien as he broke out into humming.

Next to me was Novem.

Behind us was Miranda-san and Nove, and Clara took up the rear.

In order to take on Arumsaas' labyrinth, we must look like quite an unreliable bunch from those around us.

But the ancestors were different.

With a light air, the Second…

『Do you even need a week? Five days is more than enough.』

The Third.

『Persuading Miranda-chan may be the harder part.』

The Fourth too.

『I'll bet. In the past case, Lyle built up a bit of distance, and… he could have conducted himself better… che!』

He clicked his tongue.

The Fifth spoke.

『You've got an entire week to go forty floors, beat the boss, and persuade Miranda, right? The persuading part seems difficult, but you've plenty of time, do you not?』

As the fourth said, she wouldn't come up and talk to me as she did before.

It's because I ended up forcefully pushing Shannon onto the hospital.

(I could have handled it better.)

It's too late for regrets, but the Sixth spoke.

『Lyle. I care not for Damien's magic, but just persuade Miranda some way or another. You got it, right?』

An image of him making an intimidating face at me popped up in my mind.

I shook my head.

Novem, who was walking beside me, asked whether something was wrong, so I smiled, and told her there were no problems.

Finally, the Seventh.

『If you had Damien's magic, you could conduct warfare with nothing but armors. Based on the situation, a small amount of troops could take down a force many times their size… oh my~ how fun it is!』

Damien's requests, and the ancestors' request it overlapped with.

I was worried over whether or not I would be able to take care of both of them.

9 - Labyrinth Specialist

Arumsaas' Labyrinth.

Having arrived in a wide room on the fifth level, I gathered everyone to discuss our next plans.

Up to now, the adventurers that rushed in from Damien's request had defeated all the monsters, so we were able to press on without battle.

But after the fifth floor, the amount of adventurers took a sharp drop.

Because of that, we would be drawn into battles henceforth, so I thought I would talk about that.

"Well then, I'll relay our objective from here on."

I was the party's leader, and Damien was our target to protect.

The guy himself said he could protect his own body, but when asked if he could take up command, he was completely useless.

It was because his interest in others was faint.

Dalien had made one of his dolls lean over, and he was currently sitting on its arms.

It was as if an adult had perched a child's doll on top of his arm.

"Objective? Yes, there don't seem to be any monsters or other adventurers around. And wait, I'm surprised we were able to make it so far this easily. The paths in the labyrinth periodically remake themselves."

Labyrinths leisurely change their own structures.

Because of that, it's often the case where you feel relieved knowing the way, only to get lost.

(It's because of the Skills, though.)

“You don’t need to worry about that point. For challenging this maze, I’ve brought a number of useful Skills with me.”

Saying that, I showed off the Jewel hanging at my neck.,

Damien and Clara looked at it, and nodded.

Only Miranda-san observed it was a slight perplexed expression.

“A Magic Tool? But a Magic Tool with those sorts of Skills carved into it would be expensive, right?”

The one who answered her query was Clata.

“It’s no Magic Tool. It’s a Skill recording【Gem】. They were the trend before Magic Tools were invented. So you have multiple Skills in that… blue was Support Class, right?”

Clara nodded, and I continued on.

“I can avoid battle to a greater extent, but some may prove unavoidable. There’s also cases where it would be better off for us if we defeated an enemy. We’re generally going to be aiming for the fortieth lower level, so if we can collect treasure chests on the way, we will, but if it’ll take too much time, we’ll ignore them.”

“Nice. Nice! It was right for me to have requested for you. You don’t get lost in the labyrinth, and I’m nothing but thankful that you even have a Skill to sense enemies. What’s more, it seems you even know the locations of chests. It’s really a lifesaver. All the treasures you can get up to the thirtieth floor are things I can pick up at the academy, so I have no interest.”

It seems Damien wasn’t interested, but from the point of view of us adventurers, that would be ignoring items we could turn into money.

Aria muttered it was a bit of a waste, but she accepted it.

Novem nodded without any objections.

Miranda-san didn’t seem to be interested, so she didn’t oppose.

But only Clara…

“I understand that we’ll be avoiding battle as much as possible, but what will we do about the luggage? I want to avoid keeping Damien-san’s dolls in a state unfit for battle.”

Clara looked towards the two dolls carrying Damien’s stuff, and our wooden crate. I also agreed with her.

… So I snapped my fingers, and manifested a magic circle on the spot.

Looking at that, everyone was slightly surprised.

I had shown it to Aria and Novem before, but perhaps they weren’t used to the sight as of yet, as they backed off.

“It’s one of the Jew… gem’s Skills. If you stuff items into this treasure chest, you won’t have to carry it along. WE can move with a lightened load, but I can’t take it out too many times. Please keep whatever you’ll need to use frequently on hand. Taking stuff out twice a day is my limit.”

Hearing that, Damien nodded.

“It looks like you can put a considerable amount in there. Put mine in to. Even so, for there to be usage restrictions, does it have a large Mana consumption?”

I nodded, without trying to hide it.

I had to explain that I couldn’t do the impossible.

“Using Skills puts my Mana at its limit. In battle, I’ll try my utmost not to use magic. In exchange…”

I extended my hand into the large treasure chest, and took out the weapons I had stored in it.

It was a set of bow and arrows.

But the heads were a little special.

Miranda-san spoke.

“Those are those arrows that can explode, right? I remember some

students making and selling them.”

“To be more specific, they’re a type of Magic Tool with Magic imbued into them. Magic stones and the like have been stuffed into them, so if the arrow sticks into something, or impacts, the magic will activate. It will be useful against the monsters in these parts.”

A while ago, I asked the adventurer who reached the fiftieth basement floor what equipment would be necessary.

Arrows were expendable, but having them or not made a world of difference, he said.

Purchasing them up was quite an expense.

(If we don’t collect monster parts on the way… our money…)

Each individual one really was expensive.

Clara seemed a little relieved. Perhaps she found we weren’t negligent in our preparations.

“It’s because Arumsaas’ labyrinth has monsters cloaked in metals. I think these sorts of weapons will prove effective. But do you have enough arrows?”

I took yet another weapon out of the box.

It was a blunt weapon.

A weapon called a mace, and one to hit against an enemy.

“If the danger level is low, I’ll be using this. They’re just surrounded with metal, and blunt force trauma will probably be more effective on their contents.”

Hearing that, Clara seemed satisfied.

“Clara, I’ll have you light the surroundings. After that, there’s just baggage carrying, but I’d like for one of Damien-san’s dolls to take care of that.”

Damien smiled.

“I don’t mind.”

“For the front lines, we’ll have me, Aria, and one of the other dolls. I’m sorry, but we’ll be using it in place of a shield.”

“Right. That’s the proper way to use them.”

Even here, Damien accepted everything lightheartedly. His high spirits made me a little curious.

“Behind them will be Damien-san, Novem, and Clara. The remaining dolls will be stationed behind. I think we’ll be able to proceed with this formation through the twentieth level.”

If the twentieth basement floor’s boss hasn’t been subjugated yet, there was a need for us to defeat it to move onwards. I think it will be difficult with our forces, but I have the Second’s Skill on me.

(But I doubt it would work on a doll.)

Even if I used it on the dolls, I question whether or not it will actually have an effect. I’ll have to test it.

“Lyle-sama, as planned, up to the Thirtieth floor is…”

Novem spoke up, so I answered without hesitation.

“There are other adventurers moving around, but we generally won’t come into contact with them. If they’re seeking our help, we’ll decide on the spot, but act with fulfilling the request in mind.”

Damien looked a little bored.

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t waste time getting involved with others. Well, you seem capable, so I’ll follow. As long as I get what I requested for, that’s enough.”

He didn’t seem to be interested in others.

But Aria snapped at him.

“Oy, you, don’t you have anything you could call feelings!?”

Damien snorted.

“Hah! Feelings? The moment they decided to challenge this place, they became responsible for themselves. I don’t mind if you save them because their lives are in danger, but please don’t go about forgetting my request. If you like playing hero, then just do whatever you want when this is over. Of course, I doubt you of all people would be able to do anything. You… among the members here, I’ll bet you’re the weakest.”

Having been called weak, Aria clenched her spear.

Seeing the situation, Clara wandered over to her side.

“It’s just as Damien says. I won’t deny te worth of saving people, but we have taken up a request. The one who has mistaken their priorities is you.”

If you don’t save the lives you were capable of protecting, you may earn some bad reputation as an adventurer.

But only get involved if you’re sure you can do something.

Otherwise, having them pull you down and losing their lives in the labyrinth wouldn’t be for your sake.

“I’m not sure whether they made a mistake in judgement, or their luck was bad, but don’t get in the way of my research for those sorts of people. Now that you get it, should we end the break?”

Damien brought it to a close there, and I started stuffing things into the treasure chest.

The sabre I usually used would be useless here, so I put it in as well. Novem called over to Aria.

“Aria-san.”

“I get it already. A weak person can’t save anyone… so I have to get stronger.”

It was something Zelphy-san taught us in Dalien.

If we wanted to save people, we had to get stronger ourselves.

(Enough strength to save others, is it…)

I put all but the necessary items in the box, before snapping my fingers again to make it disappear.

There was no actual need to snap, but after seeing the Seventh do it, I just began to imitate him.

“Well then, we’ll put a quota of at least five floors per day. I think the first twenty will be fast, but don’t let your guards down.”

As I started walking forward, everyone followed.

Aria looked regretful, but Novem continued to call out to calm her down.

However, the fact that the one who usually would have called out to her, Miranda-san, was quietly casting her eyes down left quite an impression.

❼

I just noticed it now, but…

“Next, turn right, and await further direction.”
“Yes, Lyle-sama.”

The ancestor’s Skills are…

“The enemy hasn’t noticed us, so we’re launching a surprise attack. I’ll be using the bow, so once the explosion rings out, cut at is, Aria.”
“Leave it to me!”

In labyrinths, no, in most situations…

“There’s a treasure chest, but it’s got some sort of trap attached to it. What should we do, Clara?”
“I don’t have the technique to undo it. If you’re worried about it, we’re better off avoiding it, but… I’m surprised you can tell.”

Considerably, or show should I put it, they’re efficient enough that you could call it cowardly…

“Let’s rest around here today. If we defeat the monsters in the area,

we'll have some peace of mind."
"Truly splendid. In just one day, we're at the eighteenth underground level. What's more, while we've launched attacks, we've not had one launched on us even once. Yep, you truly are competent."
"… Thank you?"

Even when Damien praised me, I felt quite doubtful for some reason.

It wasn't by my power, but by the ancestors' Skills.

I'm still not clear on the extent of my own Skill, so there are some things I can't help but wonder about.

Taking down the surrounding monsters, we arrived in a slightly wider room, and lowered our bags.

The surrounding walls had an irresponsible number of metal sheets stuck over them, and near the room's entrance was a rectangular signboard that let off an emerald light.

Is that a depiction of a human? Something like that was drawn on it.

"Even so, this sure is a mysterious labyrinth. Perhaps it's a bit too unique, but I can't drop this ominous feeling I get from it."

As I said that, Damien began going into an explanation on the place.

"Of course it is. I mean, it's not that this labyrinth emerged in the place we call the city of scholars. It's precisely because this labyrinth was here that the city was built over it."

He used a curious phrasing, so I asked.

"It's because this labyrinth was here that the city of scholars was built?"

"That's right. Unlike the other ones, an ancient ruin became a labyrinth. And when that happened, they kept pouring out one after another… Even the popular Magic Tools nowadays got hints from the treasure and materials that came from this labyrinth. The equipment is one thing, but to the city of scholars, this is truly a mountain of treasure. Right… for example, it's about the metal that makes the form of this maze, but it's actually possible to take it back

with you. In really small quantities, though.”

Damien moved his doll, and had it start peeling at the walls.

However, the labyrinth suddenly offered a response, and it tried to restore them.

And…

“What are you trying to do?”

Clara seemed amazed as she looked at us, but a sheet of metal had been peeled away.

No, the labyrinth itself discarded it.

It was a small and pretty slab, gripped in the doll’s hands.

“I’m giving this kid a lesson. You’re that library girl, right? You should watch too.”

Damien called Clara【Library Girl】as the rest of us observed the piece of metal.

“In the past, refining or manufacturing this metal was impossible for us. But the city of scholars revolutionized it. That technology is even used in producing Magic Tools. A while ago, even this small amount of metal had some value. The adventurers were scraping at the walls with all their might, it seems. Now, we can do nothing but look back, and laugh at them.”

The labyrinth itself a major grace given unto the world.

That was Arumsaas’ Labyrinth.

“They have to manage it, but if it disappeared, would there be problems greater than the labyrinth itself being lost?”

As I asked that, Damien pushed his glasses up, and they caught the light.

“That’s right. Though there are quite a few out there who don’t understand that.”

Damien cast aside the scrap of metal the doll had stripped.

And that scrap, as if it were melting into the floor, vanished.

Seeing my surprised face, he explained.

“It’s a part of the labyrinth, so it can easily be taken back in by it. If you take it outside, it won’t recognize it as a part of itself again. There were some guys researching that, but… I’m not interested. All I’m interested in is the crystallization of ancient technology, the【Automaton】s. I will make a doll that surpasses the crystallization of all their efforts. For that purpose, I need to reproduce an automaton no matter what.”

The Seventh, who had kept quiet up to now, thought up a question.

I heard his voice from the Jewel.

『Wait, could it be this man… doesn’t actually like that automatons themselves?』

I was surprised.

From Miranda-san, I heard he was going to reproduce one in order to create his ideal woman, or something like that, so I thought that using the dolls of ancient technology was his objective in itself.

“Could it be you don’t have much interest in the automata themselves?”

As I said that, Damien started prattling on in high spirits.

“A little more than in other things. They’re my target, and of all else, those higher up old farts are overly interested in recreating them. But from my point of view, as long as that gets me my research budgets, it’s fine. Restoring them is a side thing. I’m going to make the woman of my ideals. With modest breast, and graceful… Ahn~ that cold expression you have only makes it all the more wonderful!!”

As I saw the man go into a trance of ecstasy, my face cramped.

It’s not like it was his problem alone.

Hearing his story, the ancestors in the Jewel started speaking up.

According to the Second…

『Flat chest you say? Isn't it in the volume that a woman's charm lies!?』

The Third was…

『It's good to have some moderation. What's important is the balance. More so, it's the bottom that's the important…』

The Fourth…

『What's wrong with small breasts!? Isn't it fine!? It's not like size is everything! That stuff is nothing but a lump of fat!』

The Fifth didn't seem to be interested.

『As long as they produce milk, there is no problem. Even if they don't, just hire a wet nurse for the child.』

The Sixth laughed, as he…

『Hahaha, it's the shape of the bust, you know. The shape! It's important, is it not?』

It seems the Seventh was on the larger faction.

『The worth of small breast… just where are you trying to tell me it lies? I cannot comprehend it.』

The Seventh said that with some disappointment, but from my point of view…

(Why exactly do I have to hear what the ancestors think about breasts…)

Even if I covered my ears, I would hear it. The ancestors' sense of values in relation to a female's chest.

And their competing opinions, even if I plugged me eardrums, they came to me.

As I made a dark expression, Novem approached.

"Lyle-sama, about lookout shifts… are you alright?"

I slowly turned to Novem's chest.

"Yes, bigger is better."

"Excuse me?"

Novem didn't seem to notice it, but Damien spoke in his continued high spirits.

"Oh, I see. So you're a heretic. Library girl, you must also understand the worth of small… damn, what's with your size. I think I hate you."

Damien said that to Clara.

But without drawing back, Clara disinterestedly…

"Is that so? They do nothing but cause stiff shoulders, so I have a preference towards small ones, I think."

There, Damien broke out into a smile.

"I apologize. Despite those large lumps on your chest, I see you were my comrade in the admiration of the little things in life. Yet despite that, just what sort of thing did I say… Want me to cut them?"

Damien produced a scalpel from somewhere.

"No cutting."

"I see…"

As I saw Damien make a regretful face, I thought.

(Clara's a bit of a strange one herself.)

❼

The second day.

With the same formation as before, we passed through the twentieth floor.

The floor with the boss on it was constructed as nothing but a straight road leading to a large room in the very center of the labyrinth.

As I checked the map, the center room was connected to a narrow entrance and exit way in a straight line.

It was completely different from the labyrinth in Dalien, so I was curious.

(As I thought, it changes based on location. In that case, we won't be chased around.)

After passing through the chamber devoid of its boss, we proceeded onto the twenty first floor.

We wanted to put in some breaks, but it seems that a party of adventurers was approaching this area from above.

"There are some people of our trade coming from behind. Their numbers are… Twelve."

Even with twelve, I get the feeling they're lacking in adequate force to proceed further than here.

They likely came to confirm whether the boss was here, or maybe to combat the monsters past it.

"Your Skills sure are convenient. Support Class generally doesn't stand out much, and it doesn't have that impact, so it doesn't seem to useful to others, I think."

As Aria looked at me and said that, the Second…

『And this is why I hate those guys with Vanguard Skills. They friggin' look down on us… regardless of the Skill or weapon, the guys who can use it well are strong!』

In the Second's time, it was a misfortune to get a Support Skill.

Perhaps he was told something by someone who had a Vanguard Class Skill like Aria.

On mine, and Aria's conversation, Novem joined in.

“It’s not that the Skills are amazing. It’s that Lyle-sama, who can pull them all off, is amazing. It’s a sort of talent to be able to use a wide number of Skills.”

Hearing Novem tell Aria I was amazing, I began to feel a little embarrassed.

I do remember the ancestors praising me for using their Skills skillfully.

(Could it be that I’m actually a little amazing?)

I was sure I was completely useless when compared to Celes, but I’ve often come to realize that wasn’t the case since I went out.

There, the Second spoke.

『Lyle, you just thought something like, ‘am I amazing?’ or something, right?』

(This man, he read my mind! … it’s as if he’s the First.)

As I recalled the First, I began to wonder what he would say in a time like this.

(Unexpectedly, he might have gotten angry at me again.)

I began to feel a little sad.

As we had such conversations, we pressed on in the labyrinth.

However, even after coming this far, Miranda-san didn’t join in.

If you called out to her, she responded, and she even smiled.

(As I thought, she’s become a little distanced. Just how should I persuade her to become our ally here?)

Rather than battle, I was worried about Miranda-san.

❼

Around the twenty first floor, the battles had instantly become more

intense.

The orcs that had cut at us in straight lines with metal sheets changed to ones holding items forcefully shaped into weapons and shields.

There were even some that were wearing things to protect their heads.

Within the passageway.

I had Clara extinguish her light, and we held our breaths.

Having discovered a squad of five orcs wandering around, I told everyone to stop, as I notched an arrow.

“Clara, when you hear the explosion, turn on the light.”

“Yes.”

“Novem and Miranda-san, prepare yourselves as well. Fire attribute is fine. When I call out your names, release whatever you’re casting at the orc upfront.”

“Yes.”

“G-got it.”

“Damien-san… act of your own volition.”

“How cold~.”

As I heard the stretching sound of the bow drawn to its limit, I activated the Second’s Skill.

And I measured the distance with the Fifth and Sixth’s.

The Second’s【All】.
The Fifth’s【Dimension】.
The Sixth’s【Spec】.

The three Skills let us sense the information of enemies that had yet to perceive us.

Using the Second’s Skill that made it feel as if my senses had

expanded, I took aim in the dark passageway.

(The troublesome one is the one with a shield.)

As I locked my aim, the Second spoke.

『Steady your breathing more. Don't think you'll take them down in a single strike. If you hit, and make them flinch, then you can win with these numbers.』

Heeding his words, I let the arrow fly.

At the same time, I returned the bow to the quiver on my back, and took the mace hung at my waist in my right hand.

The moment the explosion rung out, Clara lit the surroundings with magic.

In the center of the orc squadron, the shield-bearing orc had collapsed.

As if it had taken a blow to the head, it showed no signs of rising.

"Novem, Miranda-san!"

The two who had prepared magic activated their spells.

Novem was the faster one.

"Fire Wave!"

A surge of fire came from behind me, and assailed the orcs.

The ones that used their comrades as shields were able to block it, but the ones in the front had been charred black.

(As expected of Novem's magic output.)

The problem was Miranda-san.

"Fire Cannon!"

A sphere of flame was shot out, and it headed for the orc who had picked up and readied the Shield.

Her aim was slightly off, and it was easily blocked.

But the impact destroyed the monster's stance.

It wasn't able to defend all the ones behind it either, and they suffered burns over their bodies.

Seeing that we had finished our magic, they started running at us with their weapons.

But before I could call out to Aria…

"Hey, attack already, No. 1! No. 2!"

As Damien said that, the armor dolls started running down the corridor with large lances in hand.

Without a sense of pain, the dolls thrust their weapons forward fearlessly.

The orcs swung their weapons, however, they were easily rebounded off the bodies.

Perhaps the dolls were made with high quality metal, but even after taking attacks, they weren't dented.

Two of the orcs let themselves be impaled to stop the lances' movements, and in that space, the orc with a shield raised a war cry as it came at us.

Correcting the location of his glasses with a finger, Dalien spoke.

"That's where it should have retreated. We're quite busy here, so it ran, we wouldn't have given chase… how unfortunate."

When he finished his dramatic line, I shouted.

"Aria!"

As Aria ran out, it looked as if she had disappeared for an instant.

But in the next instant, she was behind the orc that was coming at us with its shield.

She likely used a Skill to circle around.

“So she used the walls and ceiling.”

As I looked around the space that had taken the shape of a passageway, Aria stabbed her spear deeply into the monster’s vitals.

It fell forward onto the ground.

A metallic sond rang out as the shield dropped to the ground.

It was quite a shrill noise.

It was a bit of an unpleasant feeling I couldn’t say anything to.

“Okay!”

She had dealt a finishing blow on an orc, so Aria was overjoyed.

As she pulled out her lance, blood gushed out, and splashed onto her body.

Damien spoke.

“She really is lacking in elegance. She took it out with an attack relying on brute strength. What’s more, in a barbaric fashion.”

It seems that Aria and Damien’s compatibility was low.

“Aren’t your dolls the same!? They just attack straight up by stabbing with their lances, don’t they!?”

“Why not just call it a simple attack without any wasted movement?”

I ignored their childish quarrel, and thanked the other party member.

“Sorry, Clara. For having you use magic all the way.”

“This is also my job. Also, I’m used to it, so it’s fine. Though it’s my first experience having to turn the light on and off so many times.”

Magic was shining on the end of her largish staff.

As lights were part of the specialization of a support, it shone brighter than Novem’s.

“Novem, did your magic output rise? You took out an orc in one hit.”

“Thank you. But this was a narrow space, so they had nowhere to escape. IT was because of your decisions, Lyle-sama.”

I left what magic she used to her own decision.

But I’m thankful for her judgement to use a magic with a wide effective area.

“Nice work, Miranda-san. I’m sorry for dragging you into this when you’re not used to it.”

“… Eh? Y-yeah, it’s fine, Lyle-kun.”

She looked spaced out for a moment, but she immediately directed a smile at me.

“If it gets hard for you, just say it.”

“Right. Yep… I’ll do just that.”

As she said that, I turned back to look at the two who were still argueing, Damien and Aria.

I let out a sigh, as I inclined my ears to a voice from the Jewel.

『Lyle…』

It was the sad voice of the Sixth.

(I know, Sixth…)

When I used the Skills…

In the middle of battle, Miranda-san’s response flashed red for a brief moment.

Red indicated a target that held hostility towards me.

(As I thought, Shannon is dangerous.)

It seems like it will become difficult to reform her.

A recalled the red flash of Miranda-san’s signal.

And even now, she was shining an uninterested yellow.

10 - Mind

The end floor of the second day.

In a wide space on the twenty ninth floor, we had performed a clean sweep of the monsters, and took a break.

By checking for responses below me, I found quite a large one.

The Boss had revived. I thought perhaps the adventurers acting in the labyrinth would have moved to subjugate it already, but it seems the numbers of adventurers simply increased, and nothing came of it.

Tired from battle, we put off fighting the boss to tomorrow.

I activated my Skills to find a portion of the labyrinth was moving.

A dull metallic sound could be heard a ways away, and a single passageway was shifting.

“To reach the path to the thirtieth floor on the second day… I really was right to have asked for you guys.”

Damien said that as he started drinking water he pulled out of the chest I manifested with the Seventh Generation’s【Box.】

With our light equipment, our movement speed was greater than the other adventurers.

At the same time, I was using the Fourth’s Skill to expedite the process.

“Our movement speed was raised a few times along the way, but that’s also the work of your Skills, right? Make sure you tell me before you use it. It looks like it had an effect on my dolls too, and moving them around felt quite off.”

“Well I’m sorry about that.”

Occasionally, Damien was sharp.

Unlike when he was arguing with Aria, he seemed to be calmly analyzing my ability.

It's just that even if he had interest, I was low on his priority list, so he didn't ask me the specifics.

(So there was an effect on the dolls too. While I did increase our movement speed… if that's the case, this is yet another extraordinary Skill.)

I'm not sure what theory it works by, but it's true it will prove useful.

For now, the only one I haven't used is the Third Generation's【Mind】.

In a sense, it was the one most removed from the others.

It was one that worked on the psych, and one that could become a large problem if abused.

(Could it be that he didn't teach it to me because he was discerning what sort of person I was?)

It was dangerous as a Skill, but using it was relatively easy.

And about the use of its second stage, the Third hasn't given out the permission. Even when he conceded I had high enough ability to use it.

Seeing me lost in thought, Damien called out.

"What could it be? If it's about tomorrow's plans, you already looked through the guild's references, and put some thought into it, right?"

"Well, that's true. It's true that I'm nervous. It's the first I'll be fighting something like that. It's not my specialty or anything."

There are even some adventurers that specialize in taking down bosses after they revive.

They hold specialized equipment, and defeating the boss had become nothing more than a simple job to them at this point.

However, it's often the case that such adventurers don't prove useful

in other work.

We're an all-purpose party, and we have our troubles in times like these, but our forte was our ability to be able to fight through most circumstances.

Of course…

『What are you getting timid here for? If it's something on the level of the next floor's boss, you'll win with ease.』

The Second let out an amazed tone.

That's right.

My current trumpcard, the First's【Full Burst】Skill let me temporarily multiply my abilities.

It let me display explosive powers, but in order to use it, it constantly drained and stored a small amount of Mana from me.

With the current me, after one use, I would have to open up a period of two to three days. After waiting that long, I would be able to temporarily boost myself two to three times over.

I haven't used id since coming here, so if it's not, I think I can pull out three to five.

"The weakness of all-purpose types, was it? But as an all-purpose party that can overcome any circumstance, you guys are competent. It would even be fine to call you guys too competent."

There was something that caught me up in Damien's words.

But tomorrow, I'll be getting up early. I wanted to rest in leisure.

"Is that so? I didn't notice that myself. I'm sleepy, so I'll sleep now. I'll get food later, so don't worry about that."

"… Really? Then good night."

I separated from Damien, wrapped myself in the sleeping bag I took out of the box, and told Novem to wake me up when the time came before falling asleep.

❼

『Yo!』

“… What is it, Third?”

When I thought I had fallen asleep, I found myself inside the Jewel’s conference room.

The one who called me seems to be the Third.

『Don’t make such a scary face. For our little boy who hasn’t had any progress, I thought I would teach you how to seduce Miranda-chan.』

I didn’t like his use of seduce, but I really was unable to find an occasion to win her over.

Looking with the Skills made it clear.

She was displayed in the yellow hue of neither an enemy nor ally, and as if she was unstable, she would occasionally flash red.

Shannon shouldn’t be here, but occasionally, Miranda-san spaced out.

『That Sixth can’t calm down, you see. I want to try doing something from my side, so I’ll tell you a special way to use my Skill. Don’t tell the others, kay?』

“Well, there are a few things I have against interfering with someone’s psyche.”

As I said that, the Third smiled.

『Is it wrong to corrupt people’s minds with Skills? Even when, without Skills, humans are organisms that manipulate others to their wills?』

I don’t think I’m wrong for thinking, ‘this man is dark!’ at that moment.

The Third continued with his explanation.

『To control a human, you don’t need something like Skills. All you

need is art, and a bit of technique. If you think of it that way, people are always interfering with others' psyche every day. So what's the difference if you do it with a Skill? The problem lies in how you use it.』

"How you use it? If I implant that she was to become our ally, the Sixth would be furious. I'm pretty sure that Miranda-san and Milleia-san have overlapped in his mind."

The Sixth's attachment to Miranda-san was blatantly amazing.

Even if trouble was to befall me, she wanted to release her from Shannon's hands.

That's also proof that he thinks I'm capable of it.

『When people get worn out, their minds become unstable. Perhaps it means that in this unfamiliar environment, Miranda-chan can't put up her usual resistance to her sister's antics? That's why… Shannon-chan's influence might be coming out.』

Until recently, Miranda-san was much definitely more collected.

The more and more we tread through the labyrinth, the more unstable I felt she became, so perhaps the Third's opinion was true.

After living in the same mansion for so long, it's strange that she wasn't interfered with at all.

"So Shannon is dangerous."

『You think so?』

"Eh?"

The Third's words shocked me.

After she's does this much, he didn't seem to think of the girl as a danger.

『The current situation is that Miranda-san is becoming emotionally unstable due to constant exposure to an unfamiliar environment, right? Then what about in her normal life? Perhaps Miranda-chan would have been completely fine, you know?』

“… Um, does that mean we did something unnecessary…”

Because of the Fifth and Sixth’s bizarre level of vigilance, could it be that we’ve made a large mistake?

I started to think that.

『Well the Fifth and Sixth definitely see that one as Milleia-chan. It’s because Milleia-chan was so amazing that Shannon must be as well? It’s that sort of thing, isn’t it?』

I didn’t think her a wonder wither.

I’ve seen Celes up close a number of times, but I couldn’t feel anything of her level from Shannon.

Of all else…

『They said Miranda-chan supposedly resembled Milleia-chan, but… perhaps the truly scary one is Miranda-chan then.』

Right.

The cheerful Miranda-san, who minded her surroundings, gave off a greater feeling.

Something that drew people to her.

But it was something different than the fear I sensed from Celes.

『And that Miranda-chan is becoming unstable… I think that’s the greater danger here. So I’ll teach you how to use the Skill. If you put it to practical use, your harem will immediately explode in size, Lyle.』

He continued on with a smile, and my face stiffened.

I know he isn’t seriously thinking about that, but he sure knows how to talk.

I accompanied his jokes, as the Third taught me a way to use… to apply his Skill.

When I opened my eyes…

I immediately rolled away in the sleeping bag I was in.

Around me, Damien and Aria were sleeping soundly. Looking closely, Novem was also asleep.

Clara was collapsed on the ground, asleep as well.

Novem and Clara should have been the first ones on lookout.

The Second spoke.

『That woman sure did it!』

I hadn't laid hands on the food prepared for me to eat after waking.

My luck was good. I'll bet there was a sleeping drug mixed into it.

I heard the Sixth's voice from the Jewel.

『So she was being controlled. But why, with this timing…』

The Fifth stopped the Sixth.

『Right now, Lyle's life is priority. Put that aside.』

I leapt from the sleeping bag, and looked at the place I was at before.

The mace I had brought, was lowered onto the ground with all of Miranda-san's strength.

That wasn't the power she had shown since coming to the labyrinth.

"What is the meaning of doing something like this?"

I leisurely looked at the instigator of this.

Her usual bright smile was absent.

With eyes that had lost their highlights, she murmured as she looked at me.

"Shannon's enemies are my enemies. I will eliminate all that get in Shannon's way. Shannon's enemies are…"

She’s probably taken my weapons too.

If I hadn’t been called into the Jewel by the Third, perhaps the situation would have been more drastic.

“Are you listening to me, Miranda-san?”

She leapt forward.

At her fighting style like that of a soldier that specialized in direct combat, I retreated back.

But she threw the mace at me.

When I dodged, the mace hit the wall, and a metallic sound reverberated through the room.

In her hand, her spare weapon, a dagger was clutched.

The light of the magic stone lamp we used for camping dimly lit the room.

“Lyle… you got in that child’s way, didn’t you…”

As she stepped in, she immediately moved to my side.

“Fast!”

I immediately bent down to dodge the dagger thrust at me, but this time, her foot was coming at me.

For an instant.

The scene of Celes kicking into the air played back in my head.

I immediately grabbed her leg, and threw her off her feet, but the moment she collided with the wall, she had had corrected her stance. She kicked the wall, to make a tidy landing.

Seeing the scene, the Seventh spoke.

『Those aren’t the movements of a Rearguard. No, perhaps she’s competent at both positions.』

Seeing Miranda-san’s ability, I realized she had been concealing

them up until now.

I don't think she was hiding them on Shannon's orders.

Perhaps she had hid her abilities of her own will.

The Fifth voiced Milleia-san's name.

『It seems the Milleia-like troublesome entity was this girl. Good grief, my eyes aren't what they used to be.』

The Fifth murmured that regretfully.

We defeated all the monsters around, so there was no danger of them interrupting.

But my comrades were asleep, so help wasn't coming either.

Miranda-san immediately noticed the direction of my gaze, and inserted herself between me and Novem.

Taking a stance with the dagger, and lowering her hips, it didn't look like she had remembered how to fight from just a day or two.

"Do kids these days get taught in things like that as well? Well, Novem is also like that, so I'm not complaining."

As I gave a sarcastic smile, Miranda's eyebrows twitched.

"… Oy, could it be you're actually conscious right now?"

I can't think that someone this strong was actually worn out by the battles up to here, and became unable to resist Shannon's influence.

She lifted up her face, and her mouth had curved into the shape of a crescent moon.

The glint of her white teeth in the dim room looked ominous.

"… Each and every one of you needs to shut up. The sociable me has had enough, and she's fast asleep. I have to be thankful to that brat. Because of her, I can finally come out on the surface."

With her ominous laughter, her atmosphere was completely different from before.

She took out another dagger, and held it in her other hand.

A two-sword style.

“You see, this girl is way too good at playing the good girl part. I mean, she even began to deceive herself into thinking she was one.”

With her tongue sticking out to lick her daggers, her eyes filled with madness were fixated on me.

And they seemed to be delighted at that.

“She holed it all in, and cried alone. It was detestable… but then, you see, that brat had to do something unnecessary!”

I took out the knife hidden in my belt to receive her daggers as they came at me.

Sparks flew.

In case something happened, I started carrying it on me when her yellow signal came out.

“As I thought, you’re the same sort as me… It simply makes me want to carve up that, ‘I saw it coming’ face.”

As she said that with an entranced expression, I kicked her away.

But she matched my kick, and used the momentum to retreat back.

It was as if she was a cat.

“That brat laid hands on the openings in this girl’s heart, and freakin’ buried me! She didn’t even seem to know what she was doing, so it was just the best! Once she finished chipping away the outer me’s psyche, I was sure she would be the first one I would carve up.”

Running at me, she feinted left and right to confuse me.

But the Second’s Skill continued to relay her exact location to me, so I used the knife in my hand to stop her attack.

“But… it looks like the first one I’ll be mincing up is… You. My. Dear! It’s Lyle-kun!!”

Miranda-san… no, the girl continued slashing at me consecutively, and she initiated quite a varied attack pattern.

While thinking this would be so much easier if I had my sabre, I tried asking.

“And why is it me?”

“Why? Why, I wonder… like I know!!”

It felt like she was hiding her reasons.

And right now, this girl was enjoying the battle to its fullest.

While finding delight in killing me, she didn’t try to take Novem, or any of the ones behind her hostage.

It’s just that…

(She’s stronger than I thought!)

They said she resembled Milleia-san, but was Milleia-san this strong?

As I thought that, I kicked one of her daggers out of her hands.

“Aha! You’re the best! For you to not be pushed back by this girl’s physical abilities, you really are amazing.”

“Well thanks for that.”

While letting out some light quips, I lightly brushed the Jewel.

The Third spoke.

『Well why not?』

He seemed to understand what I was trying to say.

Personally, I was reluctant.

“Why was I the first one? What’s the reason you didn’t target Novem, or any of the others.”

Miranda-san twirled her dagger around her fingertips as she

answered.

“It’s because I woke up to your voice. When you asked if she was conscious, this girl became flustered.”

With a broad grin, she began to divulge Miranda-san’s inner thoughts.

“Did ‘ya know? This girl freakin’ fell for you on first sight! If it’s this person, perhaps he’ll understand me, she had some faint expectations like that! Isn’t it laughable? Even when she’s never once laughed in her heart.”

While she looked to be a sociable girl anyone could rely on, it seems she was carrying her own worried.

“And, so, honey… I thought I would cut you up first, and destroy that girl’s heart. I mean, I’ve gotten fed up of being locked up like this.”

I continued to measure the distance between us as I slowly moved.

While she was laughing, if I showed an opening, she would surely jump at it.

She seem to understand that I couldn’t attack Miranda-san’s body.

“The first one who tried to kill you… was the outer me, though. I mean, isn’t it true? Before I came out, she tried to land the finishing blow of her own will. Though she was being manipulated by that brat. Still… that outer me was just a little serious. I mean, you kept showing it off.”

She turned her eyes to Novem.

As I strengthened my vigilance, she started laughing.

“Oh, don’t worry, I won’t cheat on you dear… but Lyle-kun, has Novem and Aria, and on top of that, he has his hands on that Clara over there. He’s quite an awful man, isn’t he?”

“I’m sorry, I’ve never even been kissed before. I’m a shy boy.”

“Well how unfortunate… before trying to kill you, the outer me should have taken a swing at you.”

As she said that, I denied it.

“I have Novem, so won’t you put that on hold? I’m serious about her.”

“… Right. As I thought, that’s how it is. Even when we’re the same, the outer me couldn’t understand that.”

I was curious about her statement, but I immediately jumped at her.

My preparations were complete.

“Oh my, for you to be so motivated all of a sudden…!!”

Her face warped. With a pained expression, she glared at me.

As I leapt at her, she thrust out her dagger.

I grabbed the fist clenched around it, and averted it.

In the space between my index and middle finger, the dagger’s blade had lightly cut into the skin.

“What did you do… what did you do!!?”

As my right hand gripped her left, she landed a kick on me.

It wasn’t the kick of a girl.

I stomached the pain, and went on in a leisurely expression.

“It’s a Skill that influences the mind… the Support Class has them too, you know. Did I ever say I couldn’t use something like that?”

“You prick!!”

The Jewel let off a blue light, and forcefully sealed her off before calling out to Miranda-san.

“How are you feeling?”

As I let go of her hands, she fell to her knees, and let the dagger drop to the ground.

A metallic sound rang out, but no one opened they eyes.

“… This is the worst.”

She was hanging her head, so I couldn't see her face.

And like that, I started to use【Mind】.

I called out to the depths of her heart, and forcefully dragged her out. I was even able to push down the girl fluently prattling on about Miranda-san's feelings.

(It's good that I was able to do that as soon as she came out. And wait, that one's dangerous.)

"… So you knew. About Shannon."

On my question, she opened her mouth.

"You heard, didn't you? I know. I was aware of how she was influencing me, and I played the fool I mean… I'm Shannon's older sister."

I remember the words Aria said.

When she was at at nothing but a loss, the one who worried for her was Aria.

"Everyone has a part of them they don't want to show off."

As I said that, Miranda-san started smiling.

"I hear that a lot. But the me you saw was nothing to laugh about. I showed you the abnormal me."

I let out a sigh, and activated Mind.

The Sixth raised his voice.

『S-stop it, Lyle!』

But the Third restrained him.

『It's fine, it's fine. Have at it. Even if Shannon-chan had some influence in it, that's her real self. Rather than having it pile up and explode, it's better to have her accept it.』

The Third merely spoke in his usual light tone of voice.

(Don’t say it as if it’s someone else’s problem.)

“You may deny it, but that doesn’t change the truth. That was a single side of you. And now, I’m going to use my Skill to treat that part.”

The self she divided off, once more…

I’ll have her properly recognize the dark feelings she discarded.

“…… I’m unsightly, you know.”

“Don’t worry. There are worse ones out there (My sister, for one).”

She slowly lifted her head to look at me.

Her messed up hair was stuck to her face.

From the gaps in her hair, I saw those lightless eyes again.

“It’s not my problem what happens. She could have surely pushed me down forever.”

“You’d come to the surface soon enough. And when that happens, it’ll become a major incident. In that case, just let her accept you. It’s time for you to protect the other Miranda-san.”

“Protect?”

The suppressed emotions were always treated as a malicious entity.

But if I had to say, that’s also human.

Regret and grief, the self that no one would ever look at… while it’s embarrassing, that’s also a part of me.

No, it was the larger portion.

But I was able to use those mortifying feelings as fuel to persevere.

… Not that I was rewarded for it or anything.

“If you’ve been nothing but rejected for so long, it can’t be helped that you’ve grown so twisted.”

I touched her shoulder with my right hand, and the Jewel started to shine.

“… I guess you’re right.”

“And I’ll accept you too.”

No matter what Miranda-san she may be, I’ll accept her as Miranda-san.

That’s what I meant when I said that.

However…

“Eh? Was that…”

She let off a blue light, before collapsing.

She was probably quite expended mentally.

I was also quite tired from using my Skills.

“Even when we’ll be busy tomorrow… yeah, I’ll sleep.”

With this, I think we’ve proceeded a little in our Shannon countermeasures.

The Sixth whispered.

『So I… didn’t get it.』

❼

… The time to change lookout shift.

Novem slowly rose from the space she had been sitting.

Around her, a drugged Damien, Clara and Aria…

Miranda and Lyle were also asleep.

“… I heard she had some knowledge on medicine, but the amount of chemicals were administered quite precisely. With this, everyone should wake by tomorrow.”

Clara was on the same shift as her, but Novem let her sleep.

She draped a blanket over her.

With her staff in hand, Novem headed over to Miranda.

Miranda's hair was stuck to her face with sweat.

She seemed to be severely fatigued.

Novem gripped her staff tightly, but when she saw Lyle stir beside her, she loosened her hand.

She put down her staff, and stared at the palm of her hand.

"Why did it react like this? That aside, waking them up like this is a little…"

Perhaps Lyle was worn out, as he was sleeping quite soundly.

Looking at his expression, Novem smiled.

She tried stroking her hand against his face.

After tilting her head to the side, she decided to continue keeping watch.

"You seem to be tired from that battle, so I'll take over your lookout shift."

In that previous battle.

Novem hadn't been asleep…

❼

Everyone had woken up a little after our decided departure time.

"I'm sorry… I'm sorry…"

"It's fine."

Novem made a bitter smile.

After seeing Clara continually apologizing to Novem after waking up, I couldn't even caution her.

I mean, I had also fallen asleep, and missed my shift.

When I asked Novem why she didn't wake me up, she responded that I looked tired.

Going after her any further on the matter was difficult, as I was the one who had slept through it anyways.

"Yeah~ that was a nice rest. It feels as if I've been drugged or something!"

Damien laughed in a loud voice, and it seems that was the first decent sleep he had received in a while, so he was happy.

I wanted to ask just what sort of lifestyle he was living, but I felt his explanation would be a pain, so I stopped myself.

Aria awkwardly finished her meal in silence.

Miranda-san was…

"I'm sorry, Novem-chan!"

… Bright, and energetic.

It was as if the events of last night were a lie, but the Third spoke.

『It's actually quite refreshing to open up once in a while.』

Hearing that, the Fifth seemed to be in doubt.

『… Only if that's possible. No, perhaps I was quite open too…』

It seems he had thought of something.

The Second…

『She's more energetic than before. It's fine. I mean, like this, she'll probably help out with Shannon's case.』

The Fourth was of the same opinion.

『That's truly a nice smile. She looks like she'll help, but… when you know what emotions are lurking under that face… as I thought, girls are scary.』

It seems those words were filled with his true feelings, so I couldn't really return any words to him.

(In that regard, Novem is perfect.)

I was in a slight mood to brag to him.

The Seventh was the same as always.

『Well, with this, we'll be able to concentrate solely on Damien's request.』

The Sixth sounded unmotivated.

『… Right.』

I knew it couldn't end like this, so after eating, I started cleaning up.

"Clara, you should leave it at that."

"It's no good. For support like me, I have to properly do my work, or it's no good."

She said that more briskly than usual, so I'll bet they were her feelings towards her work.

I responded with an, 'o-okay', before returning to cleaning up.

And when I passed by Miranda-sab's side…

"Thanks for yesterday, and… please look after me, L. Y. L. E. Kun."

For just a moment… that girl's smile surfaced on Miranda's face.

❼

The Thirtieth floor's boss room.

An ogre with a large hollow pipe over its shoulder was standing

before me.

“It’s as if it’s a cannon. Even so, there are quite a few monsters with some troublesome things on them here.”

Having everyone else step back, I confronted the ogre alone.

“You’ll really be fine, right~?”

Even with his doubts, Damien waited on standby behind.

As if it were making light of me, the ogre raised the large pipe over its head.

I gripped the Jewel.

“…【Full Burst】.”

As I said that, the silver metal ornaments around the Jewel expanded out, and I was gripping a large sword in my right hand.

It resembled the sword the First used in his life, but it’s begun to take on a shape easier for me to use.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t have the time. I’ll be ending it in one hit.”

I held the sword in both hands against my waist as if to slash upwards with it.

As the ogre swung down its pipe on me, I also swung my own.

I shock wave rung out, and the ogre was flung all the way to the back wall of the boss chamber.

Its metal breastplate and gauntlets were torn up alongside the cannon, as it was sent barreling into the wall.

The pipe split into two, and fell to the ground.

I released the Skill.

“… Besides taking out a monster in one blow, this one’s actually quite harsh to handle.”

Returning the large sword to its former state, I started worrying

about the Mana I lost.

If I don't experience a Growth at least once more, I may never be able to skillfully handle the Jewel.

My comrades that watched my fight came over.

"As expected of Lyle-sama."

Novem praised me as usual.

Aria was…

"You won't use that one more frequently?"

"… I'll use it when I must, right? It's that sort of thing."

To her cold attitude, I reacted in like.

Well, it was between comrades, so it wasn't a bad exchange.

Clara started looking at my Jewel with a serious expression.

"That's rare metal. And an expensive sort at that."

Miranda-san applauded with a smile.

But she wasn't simply cheerful as usual.

She seemed even friendlier than before.

"With this, we've completed the professor's request. Now, please teach Lyle-kun your magic."

Damien's promise was that he would recognize we were seriously doing his request if we exceeded the thirtieth floor.

But he looked at me, and spoke.

"It's a promise, so I'll uphold it. Can I also throw something out there?"

"What is it"

Looking at me with a serious face, Damien spoke.

“You, at this rate, you’ll become no good. Well, not that it’s my business.”

Having been told that, I had no words to return.

I wonder why.

And the Second agreed.

『… I’ll bet.』

We were steadily proceeding towards clearing Damien’s request, but it seems I’m to confront yet another problem.

11 - A Woman's Back

After breaking through the thirtieth floor's boss room, we proceeded quickly.

With the Skills in my possession, we would always enter battles with the advantage.

We were able to take the shortest possible routes, with the smallest amount of battles to reach our destination.

The types of enemies moving around, their numbers.

Once we confirmed that before initiating battle, it became exceedingly easy.

We only carried the minimum amount of baggage, and we changed equipment based on the enemies.

When we found an unmoving group of enemies around the floor's exit, I issued orders to everyone.

"Clara, extinguish the light. Novem, please prepare magic. Fire attribute. I'll leave the finishing blows to Aria and Miranda-san. Damien-san, please use your dolls as a shield to halt the enemy's advance. After we take a left turn at the next crossroads, we'll find monsters, so we're going through with our usual pattern."

The usual pattern was to have me let loose an exploding arrow, and commence battle after that.

We would get in a surprise attack, and when the monsters were panicking, we would be able to get in magic attacks as well.

Once they started off towards us, the dolls would hold up their movements, and in that space, Aria and Miranda-san would personally land the finishing blows.

"… I never knew Miranda could fight that well."

Aria was making a complicated expression as she looked at

Miranda-san.

“Really? I didn’t intend to hide it or anything, but there wasn’t a chance to say it.”

Seeing Miranda-san respond with a smile, Aria spoke.

“Have you changed a little? Could it be you’re in an elevated mood from a Growth? Be careful.”

The experience of Growth varies by the person.

I’ve heard that experiencing battles in labyrinths can lead to a greater number of them. At times like that, it’s best to remove one’s self from battle from a while, and see what happens.

(If I didn’t have to conserve energy, I would have her stay back, though)

Considering how I would have to fight the next boss, I wanted to preserve my stamina, and save up my Mana as much as possible.

When I confirmed my number of arrows, I found that with the length we had left to travel, we had a little bit of leeway.

(It’s about time the mace will become ineffective. If we’re going to challenge the fortieth floor tomorrow, then…)

While I considered changing my weapon, I readied the bow, and told Clara to put out the light.

I leisurely went up to the corner, and when they entered my range, I fired.

When the explosion rang out, Clara deployed the light again.

The Second spoke.

『It’s already over.』

If we weren’t negligent, we were able to end battle without ever taking attacks.

❼

By the end of the third day, we were able to reach all the way to the thirty ninth floor, and while it was a little early, we decided to rest in preparation for tomorrow.

It's not like all the foodstuff we brought were preserved foods.

We brought normally usable ingredients as well, and the Seventh's Skill【Box】kept them preserved in a fresh state.

Even in regards to food, we were able to eat what would be unthinkable to find in a labyrinth.

In the room that led down to the fortieth floor, we defeated all the surrounding monsters before setting up camp.

"To be honest here, I had underestimated you guys."

Damien called out to me as I was resting.

"It's because I have the Skills. Ah, please keep quiet about them."

As I silenced him, Damien pushed his glasses up with his index finger.

"I don't make it a habit of spreading rumors. And it feels like it would be a pain to make an enemy out of you, so I won't.

The fact that he considered me a pain may mean he's actually interested in me enough to evaluate me.

(But even if I'm assessed by this sort of person…)"

As I thought that, Damien started talking about the reward.

"Well then it's about time I talked about the magic. Is it fine if that matter's left for after we exit the labyrinth? I want to preserve my Mana here."

"Yeah."

Hearing that, Damien went into the real request.

“At this rate, it seems we’ll actually be able to fulfill the original, so I’ll say it, but the reward for this one isn’t money. However, it’s got a value much greater than that.”

A considerable sum of one thousand gold coins had been written on the request form.

He needed materials stripped off the fortieth floor’s boss no matter what.

(As I thought. I mean, the wording was quite questionable. In that case, just what is the reward? A Magic Tool? Or perhaps something of the sort?)

I tried predicting the reward, and Damien spoke.

“Oh, so seeing as you’re not flustered, I guess you saw it coming. Well, that makes things easier… how about an automaton for a reward?”

“Automaton? Eh? That means…”

Isn’t that something quite precious?

I was about to ask that, but Damien explained.

“I’ve assembled the parts for an automaton in itself. And I’ve piled up quite a lot of parts here. All I have to do next is model it out, and start it up, but… I didn’t have a high quality magic stone to store enough Mana for its operation. That’s why I put this request out. I also need some of the materials, but you guys can do what you please with whatever’s left. I’ll even carry them back for you.”

According to the references at the guild, the fortieth floor’s boss was a giant with armor covering its entire body. It carried a barrel gun, and it was a troublesome existence that fired off attack magic from that.

The armor it wore could sell for quite a bit, or so I’ve heard.

“Will the academy approve of the automaton matter?”

“Accept or not, we have more than enough parts, so giving away

one or two is fine, is it not? It's not my hobby, so you guys can carry it off. Its operations depends on a master-servant pact, apparently, so I think it needs some blood."

For a doll made with an ancient civilization's technology, I think it's a bit of a wonder that it can run on magic.

If they had technology to that extent, I can't see why that society was lost to time.

(The reason is unknown, I believe.)

"Ah, right. If you're going to be staying in the city, I'll drop by for your customer evaluation on it. I'll pay the fee for the information, mind you. For now, they've cut my budget, so it's quite harsh, you know?"

While thinking he was too free of a person, I nodded.

I looked at the dolls Damien created. They were a group of iron armor.

They looked like they would be useful in battle.

(If I use the automaton alongside golem magic, our forces will multiply instantly.)

As I thought something quite carefree, I decided to try asking something that was on my mind.

"Damien-san, it's about the words you said in the boss room before."

Damien thought for a while, and even mumbled, '… those words?' a few times, so it didn't seem he remembered.

"Never mind."

"I see. Well, I'm counting on you tomorrow too. With this pace, it looks like we'll return even faster than planned, so I can be nothing but happy."

Watching Damien return to his spot, I thought.

(… At this rate, I'll become no good. Just what did he mean by that?)

❼

The morning of the fourth day.

After we woke up, we started preparations to take on the boss.

I took out the supplies I prepared for today from the Box.

Looking at them, the Third spoke.

『Lyle, you sure play dirty. To use those wooden balls stuffed with gunpowder.』

The Fourth seemed amazed.

『With the Seventh's Skill, it becomes possible to safely carry them. I mean, there's no risk of them exploding along the way.』

The Second…

『But it's nice that you arrived at the boss on the fourth day and all, but if we're considering return, it looks like you really will need a week. How thoughtless of me.』

Right.

An important thing in the labyrinth was that diving in and defeating the boss wasn't the end of it.

The return was just as important.

Baggage increases, supplies decrease, and movement speed drops. It can be said that the danger level of the return trip was the higher one.

But I was an exception.

Using Box, our baggage was kept at a minimum, and we were able to take the shortest route to go back.

To go even further, we'd already defeated all the monsters on the route we would use for our return.

Even if some of them revived, we wouldn't be going through more

battles than on the way there. Avoiding them and passing by was also possible.

(The bosses won't be there either, so on the return, we can rest around the highly-adventurer populate twentieth floor.)

Since there were bosses, we had to take breaks like this before challenging them.

If they weren't there, we would likely have been able to reach this point faster.

The problem was the boss on the thirtieth floor.

(I did end up using one of my trumpcards on it, but well, there's no real problem.)

I took one of the gunpowder stuffed items out of the Box, and looked at it. The item I had prepared in considerable numbers was one of an adventurer's toolset.

They were to be used when a troublesome monster was closing in.

But managing them was difficult, and if you used magic, or had magic used on you, there was a risk of them exploding. No decent adventurer would ever bring them into a labyrinth.

I finished my final preparations, and closed the box. Before we descended, I handed everyone one of the gunpowder balls.

"When we arrive at the boss's room, throw those. It seems they don't do much to its outer surface, but I've heard they're effective on its insides."

I heard it from the adventurer who reached the fiftieth floor.

When asked whether they would do anything or not, he responded they would probably be effective.

When Damien received it, he said something like, 'can the doll do it? It's impossible for me.'

"Novem, Clara, hand them over to Aria to throw. Once Aria throws one, hand her another. Miranda-san, please attack the monster with

fire attribute magic.”

As I went into how they should move once we entered, everyone nodded.

They all looked quite stiff.

Normally, to take on a beast like this, you would need a squadron of heavily prepared veterans, or it wasn’t happening.

Just why is it that bosses manifest in labyrinths?

I ended up wondering something like that.

“Generally aim at the barrel in its hand to start with. It’s apparently something like a cannon, but the other hand carries a shield, so be careful. It also has an axe-like weapon on it, so when it drops its artillery…”

We confirmed our final strategy, and proceeded onwards to challenge the fortieth floor boss.

❼

The fortieth basement floor.

It was the same as all the other bosses’ chambers.

The difference was its size… its width, and the surrounding walls.

Instead of the metal plates irresponsibly stuck together to make the passageways, the metal was now prettily interlocking.

The atmosphere was completely different.

“This passage sure is long.”

Miranda-san whispered that, and the others agreed.

To the others who couldn’t view the map, they were probably curious as to when we would be seeing our enemy.

I knew the distance in my head, so I didn’t feel any tension about

that fact.

“We’re almost there. It’s not in the center of the room, but the further part of it, so when we enter its room, I’ll launch the first attack.”

I was bait.

It’s not like magic could be used immediately on the move, so a role like that was necessary.

Using Skills to raise my movement speed made me good at running around.

“Lyle-sama, please take care.”

“I know.”

While Novem worried for me, I simulated again and again in my head. I could pretty much sense the enemy’s strength with the Second’s Skill, and it was telling me I was in danger.

However, at the same time, I was able to determine it wouldn’t be too difficult to defeat it with these numbers.

That’s why we’ve preserved our strength as much as we could.

(But I guess I won’t be able to beat it alone.)

Even if I used magic, its armor was apparently able to block that, apparently.

The previous adventurer squadron that challenged it tried hitting it with their magic all at once.

But it barely took any damage from it.

The main members somehow managed to stand firm, and continued attacks on it until it collapsed, apparently.

AS we walked, the room’s entrance came into sight.

The inside of it was dark, and it gave off an ominous feeling.

Of all else, we could hear the uncanny sound of a living organism’s breath.

“I heard about it, but still, it makes my heart race. It seems that from this point onwards the strength of the monsters is on another level entirely.”

Damien said that, and Aria collected her breath.

“Good grief, just why did we take on this request anyways? We should have raised our forces and trained ourselves more first.”

Miranda-san grinned, as she responded.

“Aria- you’re too high-strung. We did prepare for it, and there’s isn’t that much of a need to panic.”

“How can you act so lighthearted!? Yesterday, you were so…”

“Both of you, please be quiet.”

Clara cautioned the two of them, and the area became quiet.

I slowly opened my mouth.

At the same time, I used the Second’s【All】’s original intended purpose…

And raised the entire party’s abilities with the First’s【Full Over】Skill.

“Let’s go.”

Saying that, I rushed into the room, and made noise to make sure my existence was known to it.

A large something began moving, and I threw the wooden ball in my hand.

The monster stopped it with its shield, but after nothing happened, it started coming at me.

It held a large cylinder in its right hand, and it started pointing it in my direction.

I immediately reached into the bag hanging at my waist, and threw the balls one after another.

By the time I had thrown all five of my balls as I ran along the edge of the circular room, I was able to confirm a strong light pointed straight at me.

The Second…

『That's quite bad. If he took that head on, the current Lyle would be finished in one hit.』

The Seventh too.

『Don't even think of blocking it. Dodge at all costs.』

I was full on board with the two's opinion.

"That's quite a troublesome one."

I was breaking into a cold sweat.

Determining taking a direct hit was no good, I immediately dashed off, but the fired blast started coming towards me.

What's more, at an amazing speed.

The mass of magic that collided with the wall exploded, and lit up the room for an instant.

What I was, unlike the enemies I faced before, the form of a monster tidily wearing overly ceremonious armor.

Something like tree branches were protruding from its joints.

"A plant-type monster is wearing metal armor? What sort of joke is this!?"

I used magic.

Not directed at the enemy, but at the wooden balls below it.

"Fire bullet!"

An orb of fire shot out of my fingertip, and landed a direct hit on one of the wooden ball.

As it exploded, the other ones went off in a chain reaction.

Smoke wrapped around the room.

The Fifth spoke.

『The others can't target the enemy in the smoke. Lyle, blow it away.』

As ordered, I brushed away nothing but the smoke.

It seems that from the explosion below, the monster was forced to part with its shield.

"Why not drop the pipe, too! Storm!"

I blew away the smoke.

But I still wasn't able to see the surroundings well.

As I thought, there's a problem with this method.

The Sixth…

『You should have stuffed gunpowder into a crate. Then you would just have to lead it to it, and bang.』

It's a bit too late, but that was a plausible method.

But it's not that easy to get your hands on gunpowder. I would only be able to prepare one crate.

On top of being unsure whether or not I could lead him to it, if he attacked while I was transporting it, I would be the one in danger of incineration.

The Third looked around…

『Look, Novem-chan and the others have come.』

Round objects came down on the monster one after another, and in a space separated from the group, Miranda-san used her magic.

They probably determined it was dangerous to stick together.

At the same time, the possibility of Miranda-san's magic setting off the nearby gunpowder was scary.

Fire and wood balls collide with the boss, exploding.

The ceremonial armor doesn't twitch in the slightest, but its right arm joint was blown away by the impact.

The pipe fell to the ground.

The Fourth issued out orders.

『Lyle, manipulate the wind to send the smoke into the deeper parts of the chamber. At this rate, the visibility will get too low to follow its movements.』

I used magic to cleanse the air, and the monster that had fallen to its knees raised a roar.

As its helmet fell off, what was visible was a monstrous insect-like head.

What an ominous fellow.

『Oy, Aria is…』

Aria used her Skills to throw the balls with all her might.

The moment the monster screamed, she tossed one into its mouth, and it was swallowed.

The next moment, Novem used magic.

The surrounding air started wwrapping around the monster.

The high level magic was the one Celes once used.

"She's using… Fire Storm."

The wind is set ablaze, and within that tempest of flame, the monster squirmed.

The room's temperature instantly rose, and the beast's behavior started to become strange.

Its head was blown off.

The Fifth offered some conjecture.

『Was the one that Aria threw what finished it off? I guess you have to hand this battle to her, then.』

I stared at the flaming monster, and after confirming it had died, I took a deep breath.

I didn't know Novem could use magic of that level, but in the end, we emerged victorious, so there's no problem.

The first one to run over to me wasn't Novem, but Miranda-san.

"Nice work!"

"It looks like it all went well."

As I said that to her, she nodded with a smile.

"Really. I thought it was a plant-based monster, but the head was an insect parasite. If Shannon was here, she would have fainted."

It appears that Shannon dislikes bugs.

Seeing the unmoving monster, Damien happily extinguished the flames with magic.

While its contents were burning up, the armor itself was only dirty, and it hadn't melted.

It's too sturdy.

I'm not sure if she used an unfamiliar Skill, but Aria seemed tired.

Novem and Clara were attending to her.

Miranda stared at Novem as she muttered.

"… That girl's something incredible. She's over me."

I thought she was praising her.

"She's quite a dependable one. In… various ways."

I muddled my words, as I headed back towards the rest of the group. I thought of having Damien's dolls carry the scattered armor pieces, barrel and shield.

❼

“… I’m really tired. I want to go home.”

“H-hey.”

After having defeated the fortieth floor’s boss, we didn’t proceed any further, and returned to the previous floor.

If possible, within the day, we would get to around the twentieth, and rest the night, but… a change came about in me.

It wasn’t to the same extent as before, but my body was extremely fatigued.

I didn’t want to move my limbs, and even walking was a pain.

With a large magic stone in hand, Damien exclaimed something like, ‘with this, I can finally finish the device to convert Mana to electricity!’

(It’s as if he’s a child who bought a new toy.)

We collected all the necessary monster materials, but it looks like our main objective was the stone.

He’s probably happy at having his devices completed.

Damien was innocently delighted, but his dolls were carrying the heavy-looking armor te boss was wearing.

Our reward this time would be an automaton, and Damien teaching his magic.

However, like that, we would have no income.

Since I paid quite a sum to prepare for this voyage, it was natural for me to want to collect a few valuables.

But…

“That armor sure is cool. Its rustic parts are quite nice. Quite nice.”

As I hobbled forwards, Aria looked at me with irritated eyes, and shouted.

“Can’t you walk properly already!?”

“… I don’t feel like it.”

If there were a man here, I would even like to be carried.

But if you’re looking for one in the area, there was only Damien, who was shorter than me.

The individual himself had quite a large magic stone on hand, and the corner of his lips were raised.

I doubt he’s actually looking at anything else.

(I’m surprised he can make his dolls move around in that state.)

While finding it a wonder, I wrung out my strength to tread down the labyrinth.

❼

The fifth day.

In a worse state than before, I borrowed Novem’s shoulder to walk through the maze.

Clara looked at me with worry on her face.

“Your complexion is pale, Lyle-sam.”

“… No more… I can’t go on… ah, turn right there.”

I use my Skills, and somehow relay orders to the rest of them.

I can still use the Skills, but the fatigue is starting to become something awful. The amount of Mana my body is recovering is low, and my body is hurting too much to help it.

“Lyle-kun, could it be you pushed yourself too far?”

As Miranda-san said that, Aria…

“It was like this before as well. What comes next is just as bad.”

“Really?”

Even cautioning my comrades, who were spreading my personal information, felt like a pain, so I didn’t open my mouth.

Novem called out to me.

“Lyle-sama, we’ve already reached the tenth floor, so hold on for a little longer.”

Because of the large number of adventurers that dived in, the higher and higher we went, the less and less monsters appeared. We were able to move with some peace of mind.

When I checked the Skills, I saw yellow signals scattered around here and there.

But…

“… No more…”

Complaints escaped from my mouth.

Hearing that, the Sixth let out a sigh.

『Lyle, endure it a little longer. And wait, you’re that, aren’t you… the type where your physical condition is ravaged right before a Growth.』

The Fifth was level-headed.

『But he grows enough to compensate, right? Just think of it as recoil, and deal with it. And wait… the others seem pained as well.』

When I looked around, I saw that Novem was enduring some pain.

Damien was opening his mouth less.

Aria was constantly irritated.

Miranda-san had lost the sharpness of her movements.

Clara’s light wasn’t kept at a stable brightness.

Even when Novem was enduring her own troubles, she was lending

me her shoulder.

The Second…

『When everyone fights and receives a mass of experience, it becomes like this, I guess. Things will really go to hell if you don't increase your number. This is definitely related to Lyle's Skill, isn't it?』

The Third held the same opinion.

『Rather, for him to have to get this much experience to experience Growth… the others here have probably gone through it time and again, but this is just Lyle's second time, isn't it?』

Right, I was about to go through my second growth.

It's just that… I was only getting one after fighting numerous battles in the Labyrinth's lower floors, and defeating both the thirtieth and fortieth floor bosses.

What's more, with the fatigue that came from it, I was left in a state where I couldn't even move myself properly.

The Seventh chose his words with care.

『… Lyle is that, you know. Umm… as long as he times things well, he's a valuable fighting force. These small demerits here and there aren't a problem.』

The Fourth.

『Well, after one Growth, he should be fine for quite a while. But still…』

Even taking a single step required quite a bit of willpower.

In the end, with the relief I felt from reaching around the fifth floor, I lost consciousness.

I heard this later, but apparently Novem and Miranda-san carried me.

Damien's dolls were tasked with heavy baggage, Damien himself

refused, Aria was our fighting force just in case, and Clara was our support, providing us with light.

Miranda-san volunteered, so she assisted Novem in carrying me, it seems.

In the fifth floor brimming with adventurers, I showed off the sorry sight of myself being carried home by two women.

❼

The ancestors' evaluation of this expedition as a whole was as follows.

『Having girls carry you, not happenin' man. What a turn off.』

… It seems.

I thought so as well.

12 - Mr. Lyle

When I woke up on the bed, I remembered a sensation I had felt once before.

As if I was reborn…

As if I could do anything…

Just like that time I had birthed some memories I wanted to forget…

I slowly got off of the bed, and resolved my heart to never make the same mistake again, as I gazed out the window.

“What nice weather it is. As if the gods are blessing my Growth.”

The Third stifled some laughter.

『Bff……!!』

The Jewel was getting noisy, but that was the usual, so I ignored it.

And I have an important appointment today.

I took off my undergarments, and posed in front of the mirror.

It looks like I’ve gained a little more muscle than before.

As I looked over my body, I muttered.

“… I’m not sure that I should be saying this, but aren’t I perfect? I’m definitely the pretty type.”

The Sixth shouted out.

『We’re definitely adding it!!』

The Seventh too.

『M-my stomach is… damn! Sorry, Lyle… it’s interesting, so please go on…』

I flipped my hair and gazed into the mirror as I spoke.

“What are you all on about? I’ll never make the same mistakes again. While I may be feeling fabulous, I’ll show you my perfect self-control. Oh, I have to go to Damien’s place today.”

We have plans to receive the reward.

After we proclaimed our request completion at the guild yesterday, Damien gave us an evaluation of【A】, and we separated.

We exchanged a promise to receive the reward the following day.

… Novem did.

『Pff… s-so are you all going together?』

The Fourth was desperately restraining himself.

While thinking I hadn’t done anything strange, I answered.

Before I went to bed, Novem had explained today’s plans to me.

We’d been away from the mansion for five whole days, so Novem was to do the cleaning and laundry.

Miranda-san was going to reclaim Shannon from the hospital, and Aria was going to go with me to Damien’s laboratory in order to claim the reward.

Novem left the metal worn by the monster with him. There was a need for us to transport that somehow.

While I set my hair, I spoke.

“I’m going to Damien’s place with Aria. Novem’s cleaning the mansion, and Miranda-san’s getting Shannon. She’s probably fine already. Even so… I wonder why Novem didn’t sell that metal?”

At the Guild, I simply lay there without doing anything.

My consciousness was faint, and I don’t really remember who said what and when.

The Fifth explained.

『While it’s like the rare metal that makes up labyrinths’ cores, it’s not

like it was imbued with Mana or anything. It's apparently quite difficult to manufacture. That's why selling it to the academy for research purposes would be more profitable, is what they said, I think.』

The Seventh took over.

『Right. Lyle had lost conscious, so the decision was put on hold. They'll also be appraised at the academy. Just hear whatever prices they offer later, and make your choice. By the way, the price the guild offered to buy it off of you is one hundred gold. They're quite stingy.』

As the sum for defeating the fortieth floor's boss, while it wasn't far off, it wasn't a sum we would be satisfied with. Perhaps the guild also understood that, as they recommended we sell it to the academy. Even when they could have profited more if they acted as an intermediary, just what reason did they have not to?

"What reason does the guild have as to not act as an intermediary?"

The Second explained.

『According to Clara-chan, it's because the academy has a stronger influence in this town. They're hesitant to pointlessly decrease the reward of Damien's acquaintance, Lyle.』

In order to not make an enemy out of the academy, it wasn't too much for them to suffer a slight loss, it seems.

Clara's reward was paid off by Novem.

(I'll have to go thank her to… Should I get a bouquet?)

Having put my hair in order, I left my room, still naked above the waist.

Perhaps she had come to wake me, but I ran into Novem outside of the door.

"Good morning, Lyle-sama. Well… you seem to be in good health today. Your complexion has gotten much better. I'm really glad."

Looking at her relieved face, I…

“Novem.”

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

The heads of history started speaking up.

I’d really like it if they could read the mood.

『The bastard pushed through with such momentum!』
『Even when the moon isn’t out, it sure is beautiful!』
『Pff, bwahahaha!!』
『I’m not so sure about that, but is this how it goes? He was conscious of it, but he can’t restrain himself now?』
『To confess with this timing… Lyle, think a bit more before you act… no, I guess that’s impossible for you now.』
『The mood is… how about you take another swing at it, Lyle.』

I ignore the noisy ancestors, and stared at Novem.

Novem burst into laughter.

With the tip of her finger, she wiped her tears.

“… Lyle-sama, I’m happy for your feelings, but I think it’s best if you don’t say that sort of thing at a time like this. More importantly, perhaps it may be best if you don’t go over to Damien-san’s place just yet.”

As she let my confession slide, I spoke.

“Your guard sure is high, my love. But that’s the part I like about you.”

“Glad to hear it. Well then, shall we take breakfast, Lyle-sama? Also, today is…”

“I’ll go see Damien. I want to end these sorts of things quickly.”

“I-I see.”

She seemed to want to say something, as she looked into my face with a troubled expression.

She usually didn't make these sorts of expressions, so for some reason, I felt quite happy.

It must be because I've seen a new side of her today.

❼

I headed to the academy with Aria, handed over a memo, and had a staff member guide us to Damien's laboratory.

The room was probably quite a wide one at one point, but the equipment and other miscellaneous pieces made it seem quite narrow.

Books were piled up like mountains. And labcoat-wearing students were sorting through them.

All of them had dark rings under their eyes.

A few of them were unsteady, so it's likely they pulled an all-nighter.

"Good grief, all-nighters aren't good for your body, my good people."

As I said that, Aria, who was standing beside me, drew back a bit.

From the moment we met this morning, she's been treating me like this.

"What's up, Aria? It's a waste if you keep your pretty face stiffened up like that."

I heard the Fourth's voice.

『Peeerfect! You're perfect, Lyle! But why don't you choose a time and place!?』

I ignored the loud one, and Aria opened her mouth.

"Hey, you… as Novem said, wouldn't it be better if you stayed home today?"

Even Aria was saying something like that, so I shook my head.

She must be worried, recalling my previous Growth.

I swore in my heart never to make the same mistakes, so your worries are unnecessary.

“So you’ll worry for me, Aria… I’m happy.”

“I-idiot!”

Aria’s embarrassed face turned red, and the labcoated students cleaning up around clicked their tongues at me, men and women regardless.

As we were carrying out that back and forth, Damien made his appearance, carrying a bag with him.

He had bags under his eyes, but his own tension was exceedingly high.

“What a nice morning it is, gentlemen! I’ve not gotten even a wink of sleep!”

“Damien!”

I raised my hands into the air, and made off towards Damien. He raised both of his hands in response.

“Lyle!”

As we exchanged such a greeting, those around us looked upon the scene with shocked expressions.

If you look at me like that, I’ll be overjoyed, so please stop.

My sense of self control is starting to lose its grip.

“Good of you to have come. What’s more, your timing is the best. It just came out of the capsule just now.”

Capsule?

Hearing that, I looked around, and spotted some people floating in a green half-transparent liquid something.

They seemed to be asleep.

“They’re not breathing. I can only see them as dead, though?”

As I turned my eyes to the capsules, Damien explained.

“Did you just notice them now? These children are the automatons of old. Could it be you were expecting something made of masses of springs and gears? Well too bad! These girls are the ‘something’ unbelievably close to humanity.”

Unbelievably close means there was clearly something different.

As if she had just noticed them now, Aria looked over at the capsules in shock.

“A-are these dolls!? They look alive.”

Damien continued explaining.

“And isn’t that why they’re my goal? With a method that surpasses these automatons, I will create my ideal woman. Definitely!”

Hearing his enthusiasm, I thought, ‘wouldn’t this all end quicker if you just got yourself a girlfriend, ’ but then I felt ashamed of myself.

Damien is a man. A Man amongst men.

“Amazing. I’ll cheer you on, Damien.”

“So you do get it, Lyle. I knew you would understand someday. I mean, you’re one of the few people out there I’ve actually remembered the name of.”

After we laughed and shared in our joys, we went down to the main topic.

“Well then, about the reward.”

“Ah, that, right.”

After suddenly breaking into a smile, he took on a serious expression as he looked at us. Those around us seemed troubled.

Damien removed a white sheet off of a pushcart.

As the dust that had built up on top of the sheet danced around, what emerged was a woman wearing black clothing with a white apron on top. She was sleeping.

No, she looked like she was sleeping.

Aria was surprised as she looked at the automaton from up close.

“T-this can’t be… this is a doll?”

The cart’s height was around up to our hips.

Golden pigtails.

Her eyes remained closed, but it looked as if she could start breathing at any moment.

Her skin was pale white, and her lips a light pink…

Her woman-like build seemed to place heavy emphasis on the chest area.

And I could see a faint pattern engraved on her forehead.

It didn’t look like a tattoo, but what sort of mark could it be?

Anyways, she didn’t look to be to Damien’s tastes.

(So that’s why he’s handing it over.)

But as I looked at the surrounding capsules, their shapes differed from the automaton before me.

The ones inside the capsules, looking closely, were all the same form… meaning they all had the same appearance and hairstyle.

The same seal was engraved into all of their foreheads.

“Well then, from what we’ve deciphered, the means to activate it… use your blood as a catalyst to form a master-servant contract.”

“Blood? What are you talking about, Damien?”

Hearing that, I shook my head.

Aria looked at me, and tilted hers.

“What’s wrong, Lyle? Let’s receive the reward already. After this, we’ll have to conduct some talks about the armor’s pricing. If you don’t want it, we can sell it, so hurry it up.”

Hearing that, I turned to her in a rage.

“Sell her!? Don’t be stupid! Look at it. Look at this lovable sleeping face… right, as if she’s a sleeping princess.”

“P-princess?”

Aria seemed taken aback. The students around her had similar reactions.

The Fifth spoke.

『What is this guy saying?』

The Sixth…

『Who knows?』

“The method to awake a sleeping girl has been passed down for centuries, has it not!? I’ve read enough picture books to know it!”

Right, there was a scene like this in the picture books I read at the library alongside Clara.

A captured princess fell under a spell, and was freed by the hero’s lips.

I immediately carried my lips over to the automaton’s.

“Now I’ll free you from your curse.”

“Um, it isn’t a curse or anything, you know…”

Damien said something, but I went ahead, and kissed her.

The automaton suddenly started moving.

It slowly opened its eyes, and inside my mouth…

“I-it moved!”

Damien’s eyes were shining with wonder.

And Aria screamed out.

“W… w-w-w-w-what the hell are you doing, Lyyyyyllle!!”

I removed my lips, and spoke to the awoken automaton.

“How does it feel to awaken from your long slumber, my princess.”

The opened eyes were red, and after observing the surroundings, they focused on me.

Those pupils rested on me for a while, and then…

“I never thought I would be awoken like this. Genetic data confirmed. Master registration complete. Let’s see, how I feel… it makes me want to barf just imagining that I have to revere a perverted bastard who tries to wake up a doll by kissing it as my master… and that’s about it? Oh my, what could be the meaning of this… a portion of my data has been corrupted. It seems to be causing problems with my speech.”

Looking at the doll raise the top half of its body off the cart, Damien looked at me with sparkling eyes.

“Isn’t that amazing, Lyle! I never thought that, not through blood, you could wake them with a kiss… okay, I’ll be starting them up with that method as well!”

Seeing Damien’s delighted face, the automaton dismounted from the cart, and gave a bow brimming with perfect etiquette.

“It seems I’ve awoken to a den of vile perverts. While trembling in fear at the impending danger to my chastity, I will proceed to refer to this perverted pig who lust after a metal doll as master from today forth. Say your name.”

Her words and behavior didn’t match in the slightest.

But I wasn’t the sort to be crushed by such a thing.

“You’ve got quite a punch to you, automaton. My name’s Lyle… Lyle Walt. Now just watch, I’ll make you mine.”

As I flipped my hair, the automaton before my eyes covered her mouth with both of her hands.

It was quite a cute gesture, but…

“Even when dolls have no freedom in the matter, to take that attitude right after master registration… there should be a limit to being a useless coward, master. Successfully recorded as【Useless Chicken Lyle-sama】, but I’ll keep that my secret. Oh my, I accidentally let it slip.”

I directed a smile at the automaton.

“Just you watch, that chicken will one day soar through the open skies… fwa, hahahaha!!”

I couldn’t stop my loud laughter.

Even when I was the one saying it, I felt like I would fall for me.

(Damn, aren’t I the coolest!!)

I heard quite a few loud voices from the Jewel.

They expended my Mana, but it wasn’t anything dangerous for the current me.

Aria spoke with her eyes slightly teary.

Have I moved her to tears?

So I can move a girl’s emotions to tears. How frightening of a man.

“Lyle… chickens can’t fly far at all.”

The automaton was the same.

“With this completely worthless dickhead as a master, there may be some use in serving him. I’ll beat the hell out of him, and retrain him from the ground up. Oh, my true feelings were… my tuning is off. The network connection has also been destroyed, so just when and

where is this? It’s quite worrisome that I won’t feel certain even if I hear it from the useless pigs in front of me.”

Hearing the automaton’s words, Damien was delighted.

“She’s full of words I’ve never heard before! Someone take this down! Start off with『completely worthless dickhead』.”

On this day, I have obtained myself yet another comrade.

My black history increased, and I’ve lost something valuable to me.

13 - Novem Forxuz

… Around morning.

Having finished washing the laundry for the mansion, Novem went out into the yard.

In her basket, clothing had been piled like a mountain.

While it's true they had been away, the amount of clothing that needed to be washed from the labyrinth was formidable.

"The weather sure is nice today… I wonder if Lyle-sama is alright."

From what she could recall from the morning, it was likely that he wasn't.

Novem knew that, but since the individual himself was insistent on wanting to go, that was the end of the matter.

The right to decide lay solely with Lyle, or so Novem thought.

Looking across the yard, weeds had grown out, and the lawn had grown up in the time they were away.

Surveying her surroundings, Novem snapped her right hand's fingers.

After that, she went into hanging up the clothes to dry, and pulling out the weeds. Getting the grass into order, and gathering the lawn refuse into a single place.

It was a matter of seconds.

"I don't really like using that one."

While she didn't like the restrictions of that magic, there was much to little time for her to take care of the entire mansion alone.

Today, she was going to go on to clean its insides, and she also planned to prepare lunch.

"Miranda-san and Shannon-chan are coming back, and we've been

under their care, so splurging a bit is… but I wonder just how much of a reward Lyle-sama accepted."

Her eyes met those of a cat wandering atop the yard's wall.

As Novem tried approaching it with a smile, the cat hissed with its hair on end, before hurriedly running off.

Seeing her own extended hand, Novem thought to herself for a while.

"As I thought, it's no good."

Cheering herself up, she picked up the basket to head in to clean the kitchen.

There, a voice called out to her.

It was Shannon.

"Hmm, so you're alone today."

Seeing Shannon smiling, and giving off a different atmosphere than usual, Novem didn't show any signs of surprise.

"What happened? I don't see Miranda-san with you."

Shannon spoke.

"She left me, and headed over to the academy. It seems there was some sort of problem. I wonder just what sort of trouble your comrades caused."

As Shannon giggled to herself, her eyes were definitely focused on Novem.

Novem noticed she was being watched. But for the sake of the girl who liked pretending to be blind, she helped guide her to her room.

"It's dangerous, so let me take you to your room. Even so, a problem at the academy?"

She thought that perhaps something had happened to Lyle.

But she could imagine the sorts of things Damien would perpetrate.

Believing that Lyle would be able to persevere through them, Novem extended her hand to Shannon.

Shannon returned a vulgar smile in return.

"… I think it would be best if you stopped making such a face, Shannon-chan."

Upon being warned, Shannon started talking.

"I'm not exactly sure what happened, but onee-sama's resistance has become incredible. Even when I try pulling at her heart, there's nothing for me to grasp at… that's why I think I'll try taking you. I mean, you're already something like Lyle's doll."

Lyle's doll.

Hearing that Novem thought to herself for a moment.

That probably wasn't a mistake.

She acted for Lyle's wellbeing, and existed for his sake.

But Novem also knew those weren't nice words to be directing at a human.

So she cautioned her.

"You shouldn't be saying such things to people. Now let's get you to your room."

Shannon grasped Novem's right hand.

A clear indication she could see it.

"… Shouldn't you be more skillful than that? At the very least, you've been able to put on that unseeing act all the way to now."

Up to now, Shannon made sure to play the blind girl.

She had never acted in such a blatantly obvious manner.

(Could she be panicking?)

After hearing of how Miranda was resisting, she began to feel

something like impatience from Shannon.

The doll she had finally gotten her hands on was stolen, so actions she would never usually do were coming out.

Shannon's something touched Novem.

"I'm not revealing anything! With this, you're my doll! Since you look much weaker than onee-sama… weaker than…"

Shannon was acting strange.

Novem spoke in a kind tone.

"Please unhand me, Shannon-chan. Now let's be off to your room."

Shannon opened her eyes wide, and looked at Novem.

She hurriedly dropped the hand, and toppled onto her back.

However, she didn't seem to be in pain.

Without removing her eyes from Novem, her limbs were shaking.

"Are you alright?"

When Novem took a step towards her, Shannon found a scream forming in her throat, as she retreated in kind.

"Your clothes have been dirtied. I'll wash them, so let's get you a change."

They were natural actions from Novem, but the current Shannon saw them as something much more.

"What… just what are you… you're not human. There's no way you can be human…"

The words of the wide-eyed Shannon caused Novem to freeze up for a moment.

She tried putting her hand to her face, which had now become expressionless.

(… Not human. So I've been told that once more.)

It was a bother. As she thought that, Novem put on a kind face once more.

She was troubled over just how to call out to the shaking Shannon…

“Shanon-chan’s eyes… there’re really pretty, you know. I was sure they were amber, but now they look golden to me. Just what sort of world do you see with them? I’m quite curious.”

The fact that she saw the world differently, that she had the ability, all of it was known to Novem.

She had known, but had acted oblivious.

It’s just that Shannon had quit acting blind, so her interest had been piqued. She tried turning the conversation’s topic towards that, but…

What did Shannon think upon hearing that?

She hadn’t actually thought it that far through.

“Hiiii! Stay away… don’t come any closer!!”

Shannon screamed, before passing out in front of Novem.

Novem looked upon the scene.

“This, again…”

Letting out a small sigh, she patted Shannon’s head.

And like that, she lifted up the girl’s body.

Into a princess cradle.

But there, she felt a presence closing in on the mansion at an incredible speed.

“Lyle-sama?”

Novem looked over the fence, and spotted Lyle sprinting towards her…

“Are you alright, Novem!!”

I had coincidentally used a Skill.

Seeing the map spread out in a larger scope than I expected, I sensed a red presence by Novem’s side.

I hurriedly ran out of the academy, and used the Fourth’s Skill to get here as fast as I could.

With that momentum, I jumped over the Circry House’s mansion’s wall, but there was a mountain of pulled weeds where I landed, so fell forward.

As I was heading towards the ground, I made sure my body slid to reach Novem’s side.

I think there’s something wrong with the sliding part of it, but I think I showed up with quite an amazing pose, if I do say so myself.

“… A-are you okay, Lyle-sama?”

I stood and brushed away the dirt before speaking.

“I’m fine. I’m even applauding at myself for thinking of a new innovative landing pose on the fly. More importantly, are you okay, Novem?”

Seeing Shannon in her arms, I figured there was likely no problem.

I did look over her just in case.

And…

“Yes. I was just a little startled… so why do you have that bug with you?”

Novem looked at the bug in my right hand with an expression of wonder.

I had spotted it while I was running here, and captured it.

I couldn’t really go around whacking the girl, so I thought I would punish her with her detested bugs.

“It’s Shannon’s punishment time!”

Saying that, I presented the bug before Novem, but…

“Ow! This one bites!”

The bug bit my finger, so I threw it aside.

With that, it flew off, and seeing that, Novem started laughing.

“W-what?”

“I mean Lyle-sama… it’s as if you’re a little boy trying to tease the girl you like.”

Hearing that, I flipped my hair.

“Men are those that constantly live with the hearts of their youth. How about it, have you fallen for me again?”

As I said that, I heard the sound of a table being smacked from within the Jewel.

Everyone was acting together, and I heard laughing voices along with whacking sounds…

However…

(Hmph, to the current me, it doesn’t matter how much the ancestors act up. This Mana overflowing through my body… truly wonderful.)

While I considered how dreadful my own talent was, Novem looked at me, and nodded.

“Yes, I’ve fallen for you many times over, Lyle-sama. Now, let’s carry Shannon-chan to her room. Ah, what happened to the materials and the reward?”

Having been asked, I prepared a response.

“No, you see the maid said that was a nice piece or something, so she ended up keeping it. I mean, they were only offering a slightly higher price than at the guild.”

I think selling it would have been fine, but she went on about it being

a perfect thickness or something, we reached some mutual understanding, and talks proceeded in the direction of not selling it.

Damien took a liking to the awakened maid, so if we stopped by at fixed intervals, it became that we wouldn't have to pay a maintenance fee for her.

He's thought of plenty of ways to use a maid, it seems.

"A maid, is it? Was it not an automaton? Also, about the magic…"

"Fret not! I was able to learn the magic known as【Golem】. But I really should be mad at that one. It's something anyone can use, but the type that requires immense talent to master."

"Ah, I see."

Novem seemed satisfied with that.

It's about the golem magic I was taught, but in essence it was ridiculously simple.

It was simple… but to put it bluntly, applying it was hard.

Even if you're moving them, it's not as if you're seeing things from the dolls' points of view.

You have to see them with your own eyes, and decide exactly how they'll move. On top of that, if your own eyes get blocked up, it's impossible to decide how they should move.

To use them like Damien, it really takes talent.

If I'm going to use multiple at once, two is my limit.

"So you did accept a reward. I heard that Miranda-san hurriedly headed off to the academy, but did something happen?"

"Oh, so you knew… the truth is, the automaton I took as a reward became quite an attraction. Something about it being a crystallization of the technology long lost, or something, and the academy students came to see it. It was amazing, you know. It was as if it were a real human!"

As I happily explained, the Fourth asserted himself.

『Oy, kid. Explanations are fine and all, but how long do you plan on having Novem-chan hold up Shannon-chan like that? Carry her to her room quickly, ya' fool.』

The Third too.

『Really. Oh, I'd also like to request a line from you while you're carrying her.』

If it was a single line, then I thought that would be fine.

"Oh, sorry 'bout that. I'll carry her."

"Then I'll leave it to you."

As I said that, I took the girl in my arms, and looked into her face.

I'm not sure what happened, but I could see the whites of her eyes, and drools was dripping out of her open mouth.

It's a waste of her good looks.

"Hmm… today I've got some fate with sleeping beauties."

But the fact that I won't waste it is one of my good points.

"Sleeping beauty, is it?"

"Yeah, the story where a kiss wakes the princess. That's how I awakened the automaton."

"… Kiss, is it? I see…"

As I said that, the Sixth…

『Today's Lyle sure has a perfect cutting edge to him!!』

The Seventh too.

『This is a once in a lifetime chance Lyle! Someone like you is… fine, keep at it.』

The Second seemed to be in pain.

『Stop it already…! Any more of this, and my abs won't hold up..!!』

They were quite lively.

Thinking that, I entered the mansion.

Novem walked behind me…

"Lyle-sama, what do you think of Shannon-chan?"

Hearing that, I…

"Hmm? I think she's cute. Simply cute enough to eat up. But it's unfortunate… for a girl this small, my kiss can't be the one to wake her."

Novem thought for a while.

"… Her body seems sturdy, and she doesn't get sick, apparently. Her eyes are… well, let's just give them a passing grade. She has the blood of the Walt House in her, but it's a distant relation, so that's not a problem. Okay, understood. I'll do something about it."

"Yep, I'll leave it to you. Oh, whoops, I left Aria behind. I'll have to go get her later."

"Yes."

I saw her giggle to herself.

Unlike usual, the impression she gave off was quite soft.

It made me feel good as well.

(For me to be able to get Novem to direct such a smile at me… Aren't I too amazing!?)

Epilogue

“Stop it already!! Please stop!!”

Inside the Jewel’s conference room, I was curled up on the floor with both hands over my ears.

No matter how much I screamed or submitted, there was no sign of it stopping.

The villainy of these six.

No, five.

The Fifth was just looked over the others with a fed-up look on his face.

『As I thought, the best one has to be the『Kiss the Sleeping Beauty』, you know.』

The Third was standing in front of a blackboard, picking out the interesting events from my recent Growth.

Gathered around it were the Second through Seventh, and they were arguing and exchanging opinions to decide what was this times greatest achievement.

The Fourth agreed with that proposal.

『Right. Lyle’s actions this time around of giving his first kiss to an automaton win this race by a landslide.』

The Second brought up an objections.

『It’s hard to rule out his words of love to Novem-chan. That questionable expression she had on her face as she tried to calm him down… don’t you think it was wonderful?』

The Sixth spoke.

『I think him scaling the wall, and crashing and burning posed with

bug in hand was quite a splendid piece too.』

Remembering the scene, the Third burst into laughter.

『This time was a plentiful harvest. What was that about not making the same mistake twice? At this rate, how about we just hold a 『Best Lyle Award』 each time?』

The Seventh looked at me, and spoke.

『Lyle, those with the outstanding talent to make others laugh with their Growths to this extent are quite hard to come by, you know.』

I'm sure he was trying to console me, but it wasn't working at all.

I'm sure all these guys were sitting back, and watching the scene in laughter.

Why did I give such a consecutive stream of failures… even if I try thinking hard about it, I can't reach an answer.

"I can't go on. I'm never going out again. Ever!"

As I said that, a fed up Fifth spoke.

『You're making too big a deal of simple laughter. More importantly, can we get into the main topic now?』

The Third stopped him.

『Please wait! Just a little more time to decide Best Lyle please!』

The Fourth spoke, while having his glasses catch the light.

I hate these guys.

『I don't think his emphasis on eating Shannon up at the end should be ignored too easily. Well, there's also the fact that the Fifth and Sixth were too conscious about it.』

The Fourth's eye shifted to the Fifth and Sixth.

The Fifth remained calm, and the Sixth folded his arms with a foul expression on his face.

After Miranda-san returned, there weren't any notable changes.

Regarding Shannon, she requested that we leave it to her.

With the understanding that there would be a heated sister to sister talk, we entrusted her to it.

From my point of view, it seems I didn't have to do something like smashing her eyes, so there wasn't a problem.

"By eat, I didn't mean it in such a suggestive…"

As I resisted, the Second and Third…

『Hmm, so what sort of feelings did you have then?』

『I'd like to hear it, just how you felt at that time.』

『『Now, out with it, Lyle!!』』

"You guys are the worst! If you know what's going on, then stop me! And wait, please stop me, grandfather! No, gramps!"

When I looked over at the Seventh, I found him covering his mouth, and hitting against the table.

Did I say something funny? Just looking at him is irritating.

But these recent actions were none other than my own, so I have nothing to say about them.

Letting out a sigh, the Fifth finally stepped in to end the flow.

(And wait, hasn't it been a bit too long? I get the feeling these guys have been at it for at least two hours…)

While thinking he should have stopped them early, I turned to face him.

『Are you satisfied yet? Well, decide your Best Lely Award or whatever on your own time. First, let's talk about that automaton.』

Right.

The one I kissed to register myself as its master. The bad mouthed

maid Automaton.

At Damien's laboratory, she's currently being asked, and investigated on for various things.

If you're asking what I don't like about that, it's that she elaborately recorded the details of my conversation, and she was treating them as an official record.

Damien, you bastard… not letting a single phrase past, he was passionately intending to use my conversation with the automaton in his thesis and further experiments.

And the high-spirited me gave permission for that.

By this point, there's no doubt he's gathered all the necessary data.

(If I tell him it's no good tomorrow, it definitely won't get through his head.)

The number gathered students and professors in the laboratory wasn't to be laughed at.

To Damien, it was nothing but a means for him to increase his funding, but if you think carefully about it, it was a revolutionary breakthrough.

I had been thinking too lightly about the fact that an ancient automaton had awoken.

Damien Valle… he may be a pervert, but he's truly a genius.

『Well, it's not good to just leave her to Novem, but if you just think of it as having our number of helpers increase, there's no real problem. The main issue is how to maintain it.』

I asked Damien, and apparently, we would generally get maintenance free of charge.

But that 'generally' part made me curious.

And having returned to his serious expression, the Seventh informed me.

(You're late, gramps.)

『The truth is, Lyle… your Mana is being robbed by a source apart from us. Apart from the Mana used to charge the First's【Full Burst】Skill, it seems that a new line has been created.』

"A new line?"

At the fact that my Mana was being taken, I tilted my head.

I didn't feel anything like that.

The Second spoke.

『You're Mana has increased as a whole, so that's good and all… but you're constantly having a fixed amount extracted from you. The burden on your shoulders has increased. And so, we've done a bit of thinking on our part.』

The Third took over.

『We've reached the conclusion that the toxic maid is definitely suspicious! No~ for you to have gotten something that sucks it the moment your Mana increased, I guess you've got a talent of sorts, Lyle.』

The Sixth agreed.

『While you may be able to use a greater amount of Mana than before, if you use it too frequently, you'll run dry before you know it.』

The Fourth brought it together.

『I'm not sure if it's always a fixed sum drained out, or this is just the average… it will be messy from here on.』

It seems I may have picked up quite an extraordinary toxic maid.

The Mana that had finally increased was going towards maintaining that automaton's function?

(No, perhaps it's the Mana that's being maintained? By that thing?)

I'm suspicious about whether or not she will do her work properly,

but the Mana steal is the greater problem.

I thought I would finally be able to fight freely with magic, but that plan has gone amiss.

“So does that mean I just have to fight with the same style as always? After going through such an embarrassing Growth, the restrictions on my magic haven’t even been lifted…”

As I was getting depressed, the Fifth spoke.

『Ah, let me add this on, but Lyl… your use of Skills will be restricted for a while.』

“Eh?”

I lifted my face to match his.

He didn’t seem to be joking.

The Sixth continued on.

『Your Skill【Experience】is perpetually aactive, so there’s no helping it, but the other Skills will be completely restricted.』

“Eh? Wait…”

The Seventh agreed.

『We’ll be personally restricting them, so you really will be unable to use them in the truest sense. Please act with that in mind. Oh, the Firsts as well. That large sword is…』

The Second spoke up.

『You’re forbidden from using that sword. For a while, you should persevere as an adventurer with your own power.』

“U-um, I’m really not sure what’s…”

As I was unsure of what was happening, the Third continued on.

They were the conditions for me to be able to use Skills.

『If you defeat the thirtieth basement floor’s boss, and return to the

guild… if you're able to do that, then we will let you use Skills once more. Oh, we'll still offer advice, so don't worry.』

Rather than you guys' advice, the Skill usage is… I swallowed those words, and looked around.

Everyone had earnest expressions.

The Fourth explained.

『No matter how you look at it, with just the Skills, your current state would be able to transcend the ranks of first rate adventurers. With them, you were able to conquer the fortieth floor of a labyrinth with only six.』

Normally, a party of fifty would challenge it, and barely get by, but we were able to do it with six.

"You're saying that's bad?"

The Seventh went spoke.

『There's no problem with using Skills. It's not bad to use what talent you have on hand. Up to a point, that is.』

The Second told me.

『You haven't grown in the slightest on our own. Not that sort of Growth, but growth in the truest sense. Whenever something happens, you turn to rely on the Skills. If you continue on like that, your Mana will run out, or perhaps a Growth will happen again, and you'll be forced to retire from the front lines. When that happens, what will you do?』

I could imagine it quite simply.

The moment I became unable to move, the party would cease functioning.

In the worst case, we would be annihilated while waiting for me to recover.

A party that relied on my Skills could birth such dangers merely through my absence.

The Third talked on.

『It's completely fine to use Skills. But with this many, there will definitely be a problem at some point. When you accept a request beyond your own ability, your troubles will merely increase. Before something like that happens, you and Novem-chan and Aria-chan have to polish yourselves. I think this is the time for that.』

The ancestors that had been teasing my up to now were all seriously thinking for my sake.

(So this is what Damien was talking about.)

I nodded, and swore to clear the thirtieth level without Skills.

Until then, I would be limited to what I had on myself.

And the Third…

『Now then, that's out of the way, so the next pressing matter is… The Best Lyle goes to kissing the sleeping beauty! Any objections?』

The Second spoke up.

『Objection! You're forgetting her ignoring his words of love!』

The Fourth.

『It's hard to say which of the two is better, but I'm leaning towards the sleeping beauty.』

The Fifth was…

『That one had quite a bit of impact. Surpassing it is going to be difficult.』

Sixth…

『Sliding posed with a bug in hand. It would be troublesome if you forgot that!』

Damn gramps…

『As expected of the Walt House's child prodigy… for him to trouble us to this extent!』

All of them…

『『『I'll be waiting for your next growth, Walt House wonder child!!』』』

They said that with smiles.

"Stop finding entertainment in this!!"

I definitely don't think I'm at fault for screaming there.

❼

… Late at night.

Having been released from the depths of the Jewel, I exited to the yard, sat in a bench, and looked up at the night sky.

When I got some water in the kitchen, the face that was reflected in the mirror was quite haggard.

"So they've pressed me this far… god dammit."

The past I wanted to forget had become important research data for the academy.

I thought I had fallen for myself time and again. Just what sort of wind could have driven me to think in such a way?

Thinking about it didn't produce an answer.

"It would be nice if I could go back to the past."

As I let that out of my mouth, I saw Novem approaching the bench.

"What's wrong, Lyle-sama? Are you having trouble sleeping?"

A worried Novem was in her pajamas.

I thought she was cute, but at the same time, I was forced to remember my kiss with that toxic maid.

I wanted my first kiss to be Novem.

"I want to disappear already…"

“Ah~ is it about today? There was no helping it. Everyone feels that uplifting sensation. It’s just that it came out quite remarkably for you, Lyle-sama.”

Even if she tries consoling me, it doesn’t change the facts that my lips were stolen.

“It will never come back…”

“Eh?”

“My first kiss will never come back to me! I want to beat the crap out of the me of that time!”

As I said that, Novem’s face became troubled.

Why must Novem be troubled? Am I not enough, I thought as I got myself even more unnecessarily depressed.

“Can we not count it? I mean, I heard it was to a doll.”

“That one’s ridiculously human, so I can’ bring myself to think of it that way, and that toxicity is definitely going to break my heart. If I wasn’t in such high tensions, I would have definitely had my heart fold in onto itself.”

Even remembering it now, it was a fearsome ancient automaton.

Why would the people of old create such a malicious maid?

(Did those ancients have a pervert surpassing Damien’s level? … I don’t really want to think about it.)

“Also I… won’t be able to use Skills for a while. It’s kinda like everything is happening to me at once, and I don’t think my heart can take it.”

As I said that, Novem sat down beside me, and gripped my hand.

Looking up at the sky, she spoke.

“Can I ask why you can’t use Skills?”

“Eh, ah well… at this rate, I’ll become no good, and I want to

become able to defeat the thirtieth floor's boss with my own ability at least once."

It's not like the ancestors ever actually told me I would become no good.

A worried Novem could take my foolish notions to be an illness, fasten me to a bed, and nurse me… wouldn't that be fine?

No, that's no good. I have to become the breadearner, and let Novem live a quiet life… it would be nice if I could do that.

Seeing me become faint hearted, Novem spoke.

"A little…"

"Hmm…"

"Just a little. I've become a little jealous. Hearing that Lyle-sama's first kiss was taken by an automaton… is that strange of me?"

Hearing that, I stood up, and grasped both of her shoulders.

"I-it's not strange at all! I'm happy! I'm delighted, Novem!"

"I-is that so?"

Seeing me in high spirits, Novem looked puzzled.

The fact that she became jealous for me must mean that she was a little interested in me, or so I reassured myself.

It's fine… Novem hasn't given up on me yet, right?

"I… want to kiss Novem."

As I said that, her face was flushed red.

She quietly closed her eyes, lifted her chin a little, and assumed a pose exceedingly easy to kiss.

My heart let out a thumping sound in my chest.

Under the beautiful moonlit night sky, me and Novem…

❼

『I'm delighted, Novem!』
『My heart will break~』
『My first kiss will never come back to me!!』
『… Pff…』
『I wish I could return to the past was the defining factor.』
『So he's even at that level when he's in his normal state… I think you're taking a turn for the worse, Lyle.』

"Quite screwing with me, you guys!!"

Another day, the words from that time were reliable used as fuel to tease me. By these ancestors, my psych was being beaten black and blue.

What should I do… I think it's about time to toss this Jewel away.

Question Corner

Q: With thirty kids, the Fifth could control the entire government with political marriages~

A: Fifth Generation (゜д゜) “Oh, right! You usually don’t get that many, do you now? But there was a reason I had to do that! How about you think about my feelings when I had a need to get that many children… right?”

Fourth Generation (´･ω･`): “Sorry.”

Third Generation (´･ω･`): ”I’m sorry.”

Q: Celes is a reincarnator with a cheat~.

A: Second Generation ヽ(･ω･)/ : “Wrong. She isn’t a reincarnated or body swapped or anything.”

Q: The little sisters of this world are dangerous. Do you perhaps hate little sisters, author?

A: Sixth Generation (´∀`) : “They definitely are dangerous, but the author doesn’t hate them, and he has some twisted delusions about them. How foolish~.”

Q: The ancestors interfere too much. Lyle doesn’t need a personality.

A: Lyle (･д･) : “I know, right?”

Q: He noticed Miranda was attacking, but not that Novem was actually awake?

A: Second Generation (/ω･＼) : “Look, he was being attacked and all… he thought drugging was in play, so perhaps it was a perceived notion? The skills aren’t omnipotent or anything.”

Q: Novem is the one behind the curtains.

A: Novem|∀･)。oO(… No comment)

Q: Sevens… Lyle is either the Eighth or Ninth Generation, so isn’t the title wrong?

A: Lyle (゜д゜) : “… W-what was that?”

Fourth Generation (-@∀@) : “I-it’s fine! It’s strange because you’re thinking of it as implying he’s the ‘Seventh’ of something. How about thinking it as a pluralization of 7? … no good, huh?”

Seventh Generation (･∀･) : “Just say there’s some deeper meaning or some bullshit like that to put them off. They’ll forget it eventually! (The truth is, the deeper meaning in the title is… oh, my, I can’t say any further).”

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